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UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

MYTHIC ELEMENTS OF *ON THE ROAD*

BY

Ⓒ

Kenneth J. Nelson

A thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of MASTER OF ARTS

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

EDMONTON, ALBERTA
SPRING, 1992.

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KNelson

Kenneth James Nelson
11533 University Avenue
Edmonton, Alberta
T6G 1Z3

April 15, 1992.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommended to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled

Mythic Elements of On The Road

submitted by **KENNETH JAMES NELSON** in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of **MASTER OF ARTS**.

Dr. M. Legris, Dept. of English
Supervisor

Dr. M. Ross, Dept. of English

A. G. Purdy
Dr. A. Purdy, Dept. of Romance Languages

April 15, 1992.

DEDICATION

Throughout, this project has had to survive amidst the swirl and flow of life outside the walls of the university. One cost of that factor has been the passage of time. Yet, that same factor has allowed time to be paid into the project -- time for reflection, time to consider, and to reconsider -- and that has permitted the project's underlying concept to mature. As a result, I hope the reader will find more texture and heft here than might otherwise have been available.

Now, the project can at last stand on its own. And for the privilege of achieving this completion, I have many to whom I owe much, for whom I live in gratitude, and to whom this is dedicated. Among them are two I want to specifically mention.

First is Reme, my wife, who kept my eyes directed toward the objective, the completion of something she never doubted was genuinely worth doing. She made room in our lives together for the project to remain alive. Above all, she provided the encouragement I needed to keep on at the task.

As well, I feel very grateful to my advisor, Dr. Maurice Legris, who allowed this project to find its own way, in its own time. He seemed to understand that I needed to grow into something that, when it began, was much too big for me.

There is one other; her name is Angel, and she is Dean Moriarty's namesake. She has been a constant companion for over nine years, my black shadow, who always seemed to know exactly the right time to ask me to turn off the word processor and go for a walk. Though merely another shephard cross, she's filled with joy and love, a canine that consumes her small portion of life the self-same way that Dean ate up America, by swallowing it whole.

ABSTRACT

In On The Road, his best known novel, Jack Kerouac presents a search for a way, within the context of post-World War II America, to re-enter a figurative new Eden. What may seem picaresque, a plotless novel centred merely on the antics of a hipster hero, is deeply mythic and driven by a mythic plot. It features a narrative setting for exploring the idea of escape from civilization's discontents. In the course of its action, it draws heavily from well-established American mythology of the past, and it offers new myths for modern America's future.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Strong indeed is my gratitude to the following people who from time to time were able to provide me with the encouragement and assistance I needed to complete this thesis.

Dr. Morton Ross, U of A Dept. of English, for almost two decades of constructive influence, for his unfailing willingness to share his wit and wisdom, and for his sharp, insightful comment that helped so much to keep a work-in-progress on the right track.

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INTRODUCTION

Jack Kerouac referred to his entire body of work as an entity constituting a "Legend. . . . The whole thing forms one enormous comedy, . . . the world of raging action and folly and also of gentle sweetness."[1] On The Road forms one part of that larger legend. It embraces the saga of Dean Moriarty, "a western kinsman of the sun,"[2] who first inspires and then guides Sal Paradise in his search for a new American Eden.

The legendary nature of this fable about Dean Moriarty arises from the causality that exists within Kerouac's narrative structure. Instead of a story line merely connecting narrated events in their time sequence (in the style of the picaresque novel), Kerouac has employed a "mythic plot."[3] Dean is heroic because he dares to exalt his selfhood rather than allow himself to become a social stereotype, just another juvenile delinquent, or a cowboy, or even an impoverished novelist. But Dean's, like most cases of heroism, has a risk-price. He faces isolation when society shuns him. His distress, when he finds his chosen pathway lost or blocked, can be profound. Insanity and the destruction of that very selfhood he seeks to achieve, await. Yet, risk endows his actions with mythic proportions as their probable and necessary effects move him ever closer to a tragic, or tragicomic, outcome. In their hero/myth stature, then, Dean's actions express his dithyrambic character. They also link together all the mythic elements of his legend. And, they mark his course -- either a fall from hero to haunting spectre, or elevation from sordid hipsterism to sainthood.

"Plot is the Eng. word commonly used to translate Aristotle's mythos."[4] Aristotle insisted that the poet's function as maker of the mythos "is not to describe the thing that has happened, but the kind of thing that might happen, i.e., what is possible as being probable and necessary."[5] The mythos, which should be an "imitation not of persons but of action and life," is also "the end and purpose of tragedy."[6] It means that causality in a plot derives from action which is consistent with life.

Justification for claiming that Kerouac made a "mythic plot", one that achieves tragic values, and one that provides structural unity through its mythic elements, rests on the idea that On The

Road is an imitation of action and life. This is not to claim that the novel is, in some sense, an Aristotelian tragedy, but On The Road does tell the story of heroic Dean. He chooses his own way of life, in contrast to others who simply let life happen to them. Within that context, elements are present in the novel that make tragedy a probable outcome for him.

Risking everything in a compulsive effort to realize the self as fully as possible can be upsetting to the social order, even revolutionary, and terrifying. Fear underlies any questioning of the "stable environment." Change is never welcome since, as Arthur Miller suggests, there is "disaster inherent in being torn away from our chosen image of what and who we are in this world."[7] Dean risks such a disaster, loss of his chosen self. His risk may be as foolhardy as it is heroic, but it endows him with a heroic stature. Dean's history thereby gains mythic qualities of archetype and legend.

Several mythic elements or images give color and substance to Dean's character. They also advance the action so central to the novel -- the relationship between Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise. Dean's mythic linkages are with the American hobo, with other outcasts like the mythic "Fellahin Indians of the world" (p. 280), field workers -- especially stoop labourers, Negroes, "Okies," the dirty and drab working cowboys, and many others. In Sal's mind, all that makes Dean the one to find the mythic New World Garden of Eden. Dean also searches for his lost father -- the sort of action which clearly has mythic overtones to it.

When we first meet Dean, he is the embodiment of the folkloric American movie cowboy, trim and fit, youthful, handsome, dashing about exhibiting his strength and enthusiasm. By the end of his saga, however, his final appearance is as a nightmarish spectre haunting the roads and dreams of America, worn down and moth-eaten, doomed -- in his apparent madness -- to isolation. In between, he leads the way on a dreamlike journey to the end of the road, and he inspires and energizes everything with his legendary efforts to control and stop time.

Through it all, the mythic element or pattern that serves to organize and orient all the other events and legends that swirl around Dean is his relationship with Sal Paradise. This central pattern story is deeply rooted in the American tradition. It is the narrative of two youths, "buddies," sidekicks, alter egos, who relive the archetypal American anti-feminine (or anti-adult) theme of chaste masculine love as respite from, or antidote to, civilization's maternal smothering of their lusts for freedom. It is within this framework of relationship that Sal follows Dean in trying to escape from conventional society. Where the social order would require them to accept roles as fathers or sons, they seek instead to find and to play the role of self.

Kerouac's Road is a mythic pathway toward a dream world, in which America, once more, appears to offer potential for a figurative new Eden. The Adamic traveller along this road is Sal Paradise. In his long comic monologue, Sal tells the story of his guide, his "sideburned hero of the snowy West" (p. 5). Dean's mythic efforts to transcend time inspire Sal to undertake his own holy quest toward "the greater vision," and "the Promised Land" (p. 16).

Once, America's virgin forests held the promise of wilderness gardens, places where the new race of Americans could win spiritual rebirth, and begin a new history as grown-up children in the new Eden of their innocence. By the time Sal takes to the road, however, American civilization has become a pervasive force with weight enough to extinguish virtually any hope of Edenic renewal. Yet On The Road dares to treat the idea of the chance for renewal as continuing into a new age. Somehow, America might still reveal to its seekers the original axe blazes marking that ancient trace through a mental wilderness between time-bound reality and the timelessness of the imagination.

Initially, Dean appears to Sal as the ultimate American, a Westerner who can attain freedom from civilization's discontents. His struggles and strategies to avoid being "hung-up" for too long on snags in society are instinctive, and, at least at first, they do work. Dean's inherent capability to be "so amazingly himself, all raging and sniffy and crazy-wayed" (p. 164), is the vision Sal follows. He sets forth into America's "vast backyard" (p. 14) as if expecting to find, somewhere along Dean's road, that paradise for which he is the annunciating angel. Scott Donaldson suggests that

> **Sal Paradise hits the road with the same dream of the unpatterned life that tramped the forest with Natty Bumppo, sailed with Ishmael, and floated downriver with Huck Finn. For all these American Adams, the journey represented more than mere escape. Their goal was to break through**

> **those stultifying boundaries that amount to fear of life itself.**[8]

In its format and presentation, the novel is nothing more than Sal's great monologue, expressed in the voice of a jester, a comedian, telling a long-winded tale. Yet in its crescendo, that voice becomes bardic, elevating the banal to epic proportions. At the peak of his excitement, Sal's essential grasp on how myth and reality both differ and relate to each other begins to falter. Dean's maniacal contest with time pulls everything around him, including his companion, ever closer to the line between comic sanity and tragic insanity that he uses as his ethical compass. For Sal, however, the "hard and wirey line of rectitude and certainty"[9] which must form the boundary of his vision within a time-bound world remains intact. His fable of Dean Moriarty, with all its tragic overtones, thereby functions as a comic legend.

Sal's control of the legend stems from the distance he places between himself as the teller of the legend, and as a participant in the events making it up. His delicate act of distancing permits his exercise of "double-vision," his gift of being able to see each incident both directly as raw experience and indirectly through the shaping lens of memory, simultaneously. This gives him the privilege of full knowledge about the outcome of events he reexperiences even as he recounts them. Meanwhile, Kerouac places Sal's comic monologue about people caught up in time onto an imaginative pattern, or structure, which conforms to Aristotle's tragic mythos by being an imitation of action and life driven to ends that are possible, and necessary, and timeless.

****

What follows here are four chapters, of which the first two deal with the complexity of American mythology in order to understand and demonstrate what Kerouac's real bedrock is for his story. The third chapter considers the figure of Dean within the existing American myths as if he were a nietzschean or wagnerian superman somehow let loose on the American roads; roads offering virtually the same value for Kerouac as the primordial American forests do for James Fenimore Cooper. The fourth chapter offers an exploration of a new source of myth for the American imagination that derives from the Moriarty figure. America's new myth of Dean Moriarty -- at first -- rests on our hero's insanity; but this is a madness better read as a new or changed mental state or structure. He either has possessed it from the start or develops it during his history. This new mental state recasts Dean as an awe inspiring prototype for a new kind of American male (gender is specified here because On The Road is little concerned with the feminine view of things other than merely as yet another impeding element of society).

Finally, the Conclusion sums up the new mythology of Dean Moriarty, and suggests he is, or he embodies, a new myth for America that has less to do with madness than with a restructuring of the male American mind. Such a restructured mind could replace America's earlier mental structure drawn from westward expansion. When The Pacific halted that process and threw it back, the mentality of the frontiersman, the pioneer farmer, the boom town merchant, or the expansionist entrepreneur became inappropriate. New myths could now move eastward from the Pacific shore, transmuting the old into a new myth of America for a new age.

On The Road offers America new mythology. Within the novel's mythic elements, including the Dean Moriarty saga, is a set of social signals that offers an open track, green all the way with a high-ball, like that of a fast freight on the California coastal railway.

It's an alternative track and it leads toward a very different way of being American. Such new Americans would be different because their mythology would be different. By following the track of the Moriarty myth, a devotee would be rejecting the myths and values of mainline America with its opulent dining cars offering silverware and crystal.

In the sense that the Moriarty myth is a true reading of a developing and potentially shareable alternate vision of America, the novel can be taken to be prophetic. Moreover, as a work of art, it illustrates an artist's concern that a nation's literature should fulfil the great and ongoing task of refurbishing and recreating national myths. That value most probably derived from Kerouac's documented intense reading of Nietzsche. It is, for instance, demonstrable that Kerouac, who understood the hipsters so well that he came to be called "King of the Beats", really never did share fully either their values or their myths;[10] rather he recorded them, and presented them to America in a work of art -- like Oscar Lewis' Pedro Martinez[11] for example. The mythic approach to the novel's story line also supports the thesis that On The Road employs a "mythic plot" which provides the causality needed to give the novel structure, and unity, as well as providing the impetus for all the possible and necessary events that give it its capacity for "imitation . . . of action and life."

NOTES

[1] **Jack Kerouac**, Big Sur (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Cudahy,1962), prefatory note.

[2] **Jack Kerouac**, On The Road (New York: Penguin, 1976), p. 10. All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses. This text is readily available, and when compared, the various editions currently in hand appear to have been printed from the original type-set for the Viking Press first edition of 1957. That includes the Viking Critical edition (1979) in which the original page numbering was retained. **Books In Print** lists a new Viking Penguin edition of **On The Road** for 1991 (in its 20th Century series). This, too, retains the original 310 pages. Kerouac's literary estate is held by the Sampas family of Lowell, Mass., through Stella Sampas, Kerouac's widow. Kerouac's biographers say the family always felt Jack was another brother, and believes it has been entrusted with protecting his memory and reputation. No "tampering" with Kerouac's texts has been permitted since Stella acquired control after his mother's death in 1973. **Visions of Cody**, published that year, was the last of his works to come out even though other unpublished manuscripts are said to exist. Nor have sales of movie rights for any of Kerouac's published works been announced since **The Subterraneans** was filmed in 1972.

Barry Gifford spoke with Stella Kerouac at her home in St Petersburg Fla. in 1973. She told him "everything of Jack's" was placed in storage in Lowell. "So [he reported] are the unpublished manuscripts, like **Some of the Dharma**, which Allen Ginsberg has been trying to get Stella to release for publication.

'No,'she [said], when [Gifford asked] about the possibility of their being published. 'After I'm dead everything will go to a university, maybe, I don't know, we'll see -- but right now it's safe. No one can touch it.'" (Barry Gifford, **Kerouac's Town** Revised [Berkeley, Cal.: Creative Arts Book Co., 1977] p. 41.)

[3] **Rene Wellek and Austin Warren**, Theory of Literature: New Revised Edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), p. 217.

[4] "Plot," Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics: Enlarged Edition, ed. Alex Preminger (Princeton N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1974), p. 622.

[5] **Aristotle**, "On Poetics", trans. Ingram Bywater, in The Works of Aristotle: Vol. II, Great Books of the Western World, ed. R.M Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopaedia Britannica, 1952), p. 686. Berlin no. 1451a 35.

[6] **Aristotle**, p. 684. Berlin no. 1450a 15.

[7] **Arthur Miller**, "Tragedy and The Common Man," Death of A Salesman: Text and Criticism, ed. Gerald Weales (New York: The Viking Press, 1967), p. 145.

[8] **Scott Donaldson**, ed., Jack Kerouac, On The Road: Text and Criticism (New York: Penguin Viking Critical Library, 1979), p. x.

[9] **William Blake**, "A Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures," The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman (Garden City N.J.: Doubleday Anchor, 1970), p. 540.

[10] **Dennis McNally**, Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation, and America (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1980), pp. 314 - 315. Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters invited Kerouac to a party while they were visiting Manhattan during their bus tour of North America in 1964. Neil Cassady, on whom the Dean Moriarty figure was largely based, and who drove the Pranksters' bus, also drove Kerouac in from his Northport home to meet Ken Kesey and the Pranksters. However, Neil's frenzied driving that night made Jack uncomfortable, and the party turned out to be yet another "acid test" (see **Tom Wolfe**, The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test [New York: Bantam, 1969], p. 90). Jack, alone amongst the multitude, was probably the only one there not on LSD. Although Ken Kesey made it clear to Jack that it was his work in freeing up word usage that made publication of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest possible (a book Jack liked), the praise made no impact. Instead, Jack reacted negatively to the sight of an American flag being used (abused) as a sofa cover. He took the flag off the sofa, folded it neatly, and then left the party. He appeared troubled by his younger literary brother's (Kesey's) flamboyant social challenge, understandable when one considers that Jack was in fact a first generation American who appreciated the opportunities his family had found, opportunities denied them in their ancestral French Canada. Jack was not at all ready to criticise America directly, though he was fully capable of revealing shortcomings in the American social structure through the negative impacts it has on characters and lives he describes so well in his art.

[11] **Oscar Lewis**, Pedro Martinez: A Mexican Peasant and his Family (Random House: New York, 1964).

Chapter 1: **Old Myths, New Contexts**

In 1872, Friedrich Nietzsche was claiming, in **The Birth of Tragedy**, that cultural myths still contain the power to shape modern consciousness, to the overall benefit of modern man. There is an extent to which Jack Kerouac in the 1950's has been able, in **On The Road**, to reaffirm a mythic matrix for certain aspects of a modern American consciousness by drawing from the wellsprings of American mythology and then mixing these waters with experience. What follows here is a discussion of several American myths and how these become elements in the structure of **On The Road**.

Among the earliest rills of American myths are those about attaining salvation from the human condition by reentering a state of nature, the "dream of redemption in the virgin land of America."[1] Such a vision, shared by many of those early emigres from old Europe who settled on New World shores, is considered by Professor R.W.B. Lewis to have provided prominent American artists, from about 1820 onwards, with their "materials for the creative imagination." Their vision, Lewis claims, "was that of the authentic American as a figure of heroic innocence and vast potentialities, poised at the start of a new history."[2] David W. Noble goes further, contending that the popular imagination of the time (after the 1830's) was caught up in a notion that the "triumph of democracy and the common man" symbolized by the Jacksonian presidency had made way for "an earthly millennium of perfect harmony in the New World Eden", and Old Hickory's followers felt that its coming brought "timeless and immutable harmony in which every man [had] transcended all social and individual limitations."[3] In other words, each American citizen could thereafter transcend the human condition. Thenceforth, each could live free from the guilt of history by virtue of having regained Eden.

Noble considers this notion to have been ironical since the roots to its essentially anti-European stance, its "American exceptionalism", are to be found in European romanticism:

> **The European romantics had begun to dream of a hero who might transcend the restraints of society and the limitations of human nature to achieve total earthly fulfilment. This exceptional hero was to gain the strength for breaking his personal and social bonds by achieving organic union with nature; he would tap the vast power of the earthmother. In**

> America, however, where the West stretched to the distant horizon as a great and magnificent expanse of virgin land, it was possible for every man to achieve this romantic vision of the European poets and even to transcend it. Here the common man, the people, would realize the good that English and German poets held out only for heroes and supermen. The soaring faith of the American romantic affirmed the ability of the average citizen to rise above his personal weaknesses and the traditions and institutions of his European ancestors because, in the United States, every individual was in close contact with nature; the West was a limitless reservoir of spiritual strength.[4]

From the 1820's until as late as the 1890's, there was a firm basis in fact, in good solid earth, for the idea that the West was a "limitless reservoir." At the time of the 1820 census, as Frederick Jackson Turner comments, the "frontier region of the time lay along the Great Lakes . . . and beyond the Mississippi."[5] From the perspective of pioneers intent on moving ever westward to colonize new settlements, that meant an entire half-continent still remained on the far side of "the hither edge of free land"[6] known as the frontier. For perhaps seventy years, then, a real and palpable land base for the "reservoir of spiritual strength" existed -- even while it was being eroded away as the frontier line advanced into it, surrounded bits of it, and finally rolled over it as each landmark received its new American name.

Control and ownership of land and what it might produce, as a means to wealth and power, was hardly the kind of "spiritual strength" the romantics were thinking about; but as a practical matter the land beyond the frontier was there for Americans to take and to make of it what they could. Their governments of the time, whether federal, state, or territorial, used military, trade, and economic policies to ensure that any indigenous populations encountered in the new lands would submit and decline, thus making way for more American settlement. Throughout, suggests Henry Nash Smith, this period of westward expansion entailed the working out of "agrarian doctrines" adopted by Jefferson shortly after the Republic was first formed, "in which the public lands were to be conveyed to individual owners."[7] New settlement was conceived of as agricultural, and the farmers as "a republican symbol" in an unstratified society. These ideas took on a "nationalistic coloring by insisting that the society of the new nation was a concrete embodiment of what had been in Europe but a utopian dream."[8] Symbolically, then, the movement into the West began to encompass Europe's old mythic dream, the attainment of "a place where afflicted humanity raises her drooping head; where conscience ceases to be a slave, and laws are no more than the security of happiness."[9]

Oddly, from the standpoint of the romantics with their vision of a new Eden, most of the pioneers seemed intent on "civilizing" their new domains rather than on escaping into them, away from civilization. New cities grew up very quickly because what the practical man was after was not so much spiritual as material, economic, and political strength. These strengths were things the new lands definitely could provide, and did.

Yet, Turner argues, because of the frontier experience, these new cities and settlements were being populated by people who were very different from their Eastern seaboard antecedents. Their experiences, their own "histories" as individuals who had to live and survive along the frontier, made them different. That idea has ironic plausibility and probability pulsing within it. For instance, a few of these people would have felt forced to "make a good Indian" at the expense of some young and poorly armed "redskinned hostile" who got in their way. When someone feels compelled to murder, even if in self-defence, or in carrying out a military order, it is reasonable to expect the person will be changed by the experience. The irony of this is that the violent image of pioneer life we tend to hold today, a legacy of our attending too many Saturday matinees, is not the experience Turner was thinking about. Rather, his point was that the westering pioneers were continually starting new settlements, then moving on and starting over again, and it was this functional experience which made them different. Supposedly, one result of the pioneers' different experience was that their institutions were also different from those of their direct ancestors. Turner claims:

> **The peculiarity of American institutions is, [sic] the fact that they have been compelled to adapt themselves to the changes of an expanding people -- to the changes involved in crossing a continent, in winning a wilderness, and in developing at each area of this progress out of the primitive economic and political conditions of the frontier into the complexity of city life.[10]**

Turner's formula sees the lure of free land pulling the Americans westward. And then, at each stage in the expansion, there was a "return to primitive conditions on a continually advancing frontier line, and . . . American social development [was] continually beginning over again on the frontier." In Turner's view, the "perennial rebirth" which went along with westward expansion was what furnished "the forces dominating American character."[11] Turner observes that

> When the backwoodsmen crossed the Alleghenies they put between themselves and the Atlantic coast a barrier which seemed to separate them from a region already too much like the Europe they had left, and as they followed the courses of the rivers that flowed to the Mississippi, they called themselves "Men of the Western Waters," and their new home in the Mississippi Valley was the "Western World." Here, by the thirties, Jacksonian democracy flourished, strong in the faith of the intrinsic excellence of the common man, in his right to make his own place in the world, and in his capacity to share in government. But while Jacksonian democracy demanded these rights, it was . . . based on the good fellowship and genuine social feeling of the frontier, in which classes and inequalities of fortune played little part. But it did not demand equality of condition, for there was abundance of natural resources and the belief that the self-made man had a right to his success in the free competition which western life afforded, was as prominent in their thought as was the love of democracy. On the other hand, they viewed governmental restraints with suspicion as a limitation on their right to work out their own individuality.[12]

On one hand, then, westward expansion was the product of very practical Americans (the white sons and daughters of British and European tribal stock) all seeking to own and control free land, and what it could produce, for very worldly reasons. Yet, on the other, romantic visionaries still saw a different potential in this westward movement of Americans. In it, they believed, and from it, they were sure, would come men reborn as American Adams enjoying, perhaps for a thousand years, the innocence and time transcendence of The American Eden. However, despite Turner's arguments in support of the notion that Americans in the West were different from their ancestors in the East and in Europe because of their frontier experience, there nevertheless remains a distinct distance between the practical Western American and the ideal of the American Adam. As new a man as he might once have seemed to be, whether he stood in the cornfields of the Mississippi Valley or amidst the grapes and vineyards of the San Joaquin, his strength was/is less spiritual, more material than the visionaries had hoped for him. Given the opportunity, he still makes cities where he might have made gardens.

Turner saw the contradiction, too. In his preface for **The Frontier in American History**, he expressed his concern about the future which, he believed,

> alone can disclose how far [my] interpretations are correct for the age of colonization which came gradually to an end with the disappearance of the frontier and free land. It alone can reveal how much the courageous, creative American spirit, and how large a part of the historic American ideals are to be carried over into that new age which is replacing the era of free lands and of measurable isolation by consolidated and complex industrial development and by increasing resemblances and connections between the New World and the Old.[13]

He is right to pose the question; others have as well. Henry Nash Smith, for one, points to the inherent contradictions within the Frontier Thesis. When Ben Franklin and his friends perceived in "the waiting West" a promise of "an indefinite expansion of a simple agricultural society", they were looking for the best sort of guarantee that America could "maintain its republican institutions", and would for as long as possible avoid "the depravity of crowded Europe."[14] These ideas, together with notions of a society of yeoman farmers as expressed in the Jeffersonian doctrine, arose from the myth of the garden, as does Turner's hypothesis with, as Smith says, its

> affirmation of democracy, and its doctrine of geographical determinism [that] derive from a still broader tradition of Western thought. . . . Turner's immersion in this stream

> **. . . [committed] him to certain archaic assumptions which hampered his approach to 20th century problems. But . . . the myth of the garden . . . expressed beliefs as well as statistics.[15]**

Smith further insists that "the ideas of savagery and civilization", for Turner, defined the frontier, which was the meeting point between the two, and since "the outer limit of agricultural civilization [then became] the boundary of civilization", Turner in effect creates "two Wests, one beyond and one within this all-important line."**[16]** Such a commitment to the idea of agrarian civilization, Smith suggests, also commits Turner to "the theory that all societies, including those of successive Wests, develop through . . . progressively higher stages." That is certainly "at odds with the conception of the Western farmer as a yeoman surrounded by utopian splendor", Smith comments, because it implies that this yeoman is at "a primitive stage of social development."**[17]** Where, then, are the highest values of social development to be found; within the agricultural frontier to which Turner quite obviously has given his allegiance, or within the urban industrial society?

There is another great contradiction present right within the terms Turner uses to express the value of the frontier heritage. It was pointed out by Van Wyck Brooks, and by other early Turner critics, that simply by inverting Turner's values used to describe the American self-made man, his independence, self-sufficiency, energy, and progressiveness, one can -- as Richard Hofstadter points out -- also account for "rampant individualism . . . crass speculative commercialism . . . roughness and coarseness . . . vigilantes and . . . lynch law."[18]

Adamant in these ironic critiques of Turner's position is the belief of these writers that the approach taken by the "new Adam" toward the American garden was as often aggressive and violent as it was Utopian or creative; that, in fact, the American Adam was not "new" after all, but merely the old eternal one placed in new surroundings. Or, as suggested by John Cawelti, there may also be an even more disturbing idea contained in these critiques.

> **The myth of the West is the myth of America in this very special sense: that men can leave their history behind and father a higher human possibility on a virgin continent. The power of this imaginative vision, often referred to as the American Dream, has, until recently, survived our growing awareness that our approach to the New World was less**

> analogous to a marriage with a virgin than to the rape and murder of a neighbor's wife.[19]

Cawelti points out further still just how that duality, or contradiction, manifested in the positive and negative poles of the "American Dream", is reflected again in two fundamentally opposed concepts, or visions, of the West.

> The first is a vision of the West as a place where men can construct a new and better society which by virtue of its superior order and environment will avoid all the mistakes and evils of past history. This might be called the conception of the West as God's country. The other great theme of our Western imaginings is in many respects the very contrary of the first: it is the dream of the West as escape, the perennial safety valve not of Frederick Jackson Turner but of Huckleberry Finn, the territory where one can flee from the constraints and responsibilities of civilization, to become free, savage and natural.[20]

It is as if Turner's two Wests, one on either side of the frontier line, could be transmuted into two visions superimposed upon the same space, at the same time. Sal expresses the continuing nature of the contradiction when, within the context of Los Angeles, he comments on the street action in that epitome of all the cities ever built within the new West. "When all is said and done", he observes, for everybody on the Coast, "LA" is "their one and only golden town."[21] But at the same time, "LA is the loneliest and most brutal of American cities", and his double-vision, or hindsight, reveals it as "a jungle" (p. 85). The contradiction is almost left unresolved, dissonant, except for the briefest echo over 200 pages later, when Sal notes how "the jungle takes you over, and you become it" (p. 294). Survival, either in the jungle, or in "LA", is an adaptive process, and Sal's observation of it acting upon himself seems almost to recognize a potential for some mystic "retribalization" process to occur. Sal, lying atop a car roof, there within the Mexican jungle night, feels the jungle's flying insects take their blood meals from him as he sleeps, exchanging his blood, perhaps, with tribesmen living nearby -- though out of sight inside the jungle itself. Does this make him their blood brother? Could such a process of retribalization also be at work within the American hobo jungles where Dean and Sal seek Dean's lost father, or in the "jungle" of LA where the hipsters dream? Whatever Sal is talking about, it is irrational, and counter to logical, civilizing processes. If he stays overlong, there in the jungle, would he be irrationally driven to enter into tribal life? Or has Dean brought his friend to the gateway of Eden, but then forgotten to mention it? These questions are rhetorical, but they make the point -- America's Eden is at the opposite end of a scale of values which created the American cities, a scale which runs along a line from the tribal dark to the civic light, with all the shades of the grey scale strung, like a washing sadly swinging, from the line between those poles.

Although a civilization consists of a vast panoply of factors, qualities, customs, and ideas, one of its main constituents is the opportunity it provides to live one's life in, or in connection with, a city. Desiring such an opportunity is in direct variance from the rural nature of Turner's ideal of an agrarian civilization. Always, it seems, a centripetal force pulls people cityward. It must also be pointed out that even if the way into the New World Eden was once thought to be discoverable along some outward - bound pathway or road, as poor Hester Prynne once supposed, then postwar America including the West should have to be considered a poor place to look.

All the roads had, by then, been connected into a red-line spider's web; it had become a "Paper America" (p. 106) of roadmaps, with every burg and metropolis hooked on. Any traveller leaving one of these places moves inevitably closer to another. In this particular sense of its being virtually without a physical place left to go looking for an Eden, America could be considered fallen and irredeemable. In the words of a once popular song, they'd "paved paradise and put up a parking lot"[22], a symbolic burial of an American mythic dream of salvation.

Gerald D. Nash puts these circumstances into even more "concrete" terms, covering the postwar period:

> **Highway commissioners began to take on awesome powers, literally moving men, women, and mountains. They redid the landscape everywhere . . . undoing the work of Nature . . . in their determination to cover the countryside with Portland cement. . . . And so, between 1945 and 1960 freeways became the most notable public space open to the movement of people in this automotive age, just as streets and boulevards had been in an earlier era.**[23]

Consequently, America's paved roads were less and less arenas of escape from urban civilization because they were in the process of becoming extensions of it. Like the tentacles of metropolitan octopi, the roads helped to pull apart Turner's beloved agrarian civilization, a process that had begun almost as soon as there were farms, but which was accelerating rapidly about the time Dean and Sal were embarked upon their frantic search back and forth across America. In that context, their quest becomes a test, a probe, to see what remains of that paradisal America which once was placed in the hands of the new Adam.

The accelerating rush to the cities, the secularization of society and the absorption of urban values going on in even the most remote backwoods places, along with the acquisition of intellectual, political, and economic dominance by the sciences made postwar America into what Nietzsche would have called a "community of Socratic men."[24] He postulated that term for what he found to be most deplorable about the European civilization he knew in 1871. When he thundered against "Socratic men", his target was a condition of mind afflicted with too much detachment and abstraction. He warned that a culture which turns away from its wellsprings, those myths on which it is based, will lose "its natural, healthy creativity."[25] (Professor Lewis's phrase about materials for the creative imagination, quoted earlier, seems to be in some accord with Nietzsche here.)

What Nietzsche was prescribing for such sick "Socratic" cultures was a return to that which he called "tragedy." For his models and analogues, he looked to the Greeks prior to Socrates. In so doing, he gave us terms for exploring that mental war zone within which every nation struggles to understand itself and its art.

Perhaps as profound as any of the terms he used were those contained in his description of complementary, yet contrasting, forces in the creative mind -- which he referred to as Apollonian and Dionysian -- "the separate art realms of dream and intoxication"[26], and which interact to produce the timeless fulfilment of the "tragic myth."[27] The Birth of Tragedy from the Spirit of Music proclaimed the imminent "rebirth of German myth"[28] which Nietzsche felt would ultimately result from the progress of German music, a "Dionysiac bird" hovering overhead and calling Germany back to its "lost homeland"[29] and mythic roots.

On The Road presents a search for a basis upon which America's lost myths too might be reconstituted. That search occurs within the "vast backyard" of America, which is shared by a large, diverse, and energetic "family" whose members seem to be primarily concerned with "making it." Dean is like an outcast member of that broad American family, outcast because he personifies unwelcome Dionysian forces being reintroduced into a postwar society characterized by what Nietzsche called "Socratism bent on the extermination of myth."[30]

This was a society which had organized itself superbly as an entity capable of out-producing and out-fighting the greatest war machines ever mobilized. The price paid for this accomplishment is similar to that which Nietzsche itemized for a victorious Germany after 1871. America was now a realm where, in Kerouac's own phrase, "old American whoopee"[31] could no longer be appreciated, and where Dionysian excesses were probably not even legal. There was now a strong Socratic-scientific ideology established in America, and tragedy -- at least in literary terms -- had become absorbed by psychiatry in the belief that suffering is a mental problem. Farce ruled instead. Dance was carefully choreographed. During this postwar period, spontaneity in song, word or gesture was disturbing to the general order of society. Lives were lived within commercial rather than natural cycles, such as the annual model change or the raising and lowering of hemlines, and in tune with the measured pace of education, career, marriage, and mortgage payments. This, in postwar America, became the form taken by what Nietzsche had called the great optimist-rationalist-utilitarian victory over Dionysian forces.

One result was an equation of material plenty with emotional security (perhaps an echo of the Puritan idea that the "elect" naturally had better net worth statements), which means that virtue accrues to the "well adjusted" who can submerge their darker feelings in the sunny haze of an ever-expanding gross national product. As well, where once America found its definition in terms of its ever moving frontier line, it now looked to its own Olympians, its gods and goddesses of Hollywood. The moviemakers' more stereotyped comedies and dramas -- those shorn of Dionysian influence -- celebrated the triumph of "moral" virtue and proclaimed the inevitable consequences -- suffering and shame -- which must come to all transgressors of the general order. It followed that those who suffer must be guilty, and Sal draws attention to the guilt of his fellow sufferers in modern America:

> And Dean and I, ragged and dirty as if we had lived off locust, stumbled out of the bus in Detroit. We decided to stay up in all-night movies on Skid Row. . . . For thirty-five cents each we went into the beat-up old movie and sat down in the balcony till morning, when we were shooed downstairs. The people who were in that all-night movie were the end. Beat Negroes who'd come up from Alabama to work in car factories on a rumor; old white bums; young longhaired hipsters who'd reached the end of the road and were drinking wine; whores, ordinary couples, and housewives with nothing to do, nowhere to go, nobody to believe in. If you sifted all Detroit in a wire basket the beater [sic] solid core of dregs couldn't be better gathered. The picture was Singing Cowboy Eddie Dean and his gallant white horse Bloop, that was number one; number two double-feature film was George Raft, Sidney Greenstreet, and Peter Lorre in a picture about Istanbul. We saw both of these things six times each during the night . . . , we were permeated completely with the strange Gray Myth of the West and the weird dark Myth of the East when morning came. . . . People slugged out of bottles and turned around and looked everywhere in the dark theatre for something to do, somebody to talk to. In the head everybody was guiltily quiet, nobody talked.(pp. 243-244)

In Nietzsche's view, the "disappearance of tragedy [the lyric poems sung by the chorus in the epic dramas of such poets as Aeschylus and Sophocles] also spelled the disappearance of myth"[32] in ancient Greece. Earlier, illusion and delight, Apollo and Dionysus, had combined in the tribal or "tragic man's" accommodation of his suffering with his primal pessimism. But then a theoretical or scientific world view grew within the Greek mind, producing an optimistic, abstract, mental reconstruction of phenomena that Nietzsche terms "Socratic". He claims that this mental rejigging destroyed the myths upon which "tragic man" depended.

Marshal McLuhan makes a powerful point about this issue when he embellishes some ideas from Eric Havelock's Preface to Plato[33], which contrasts Greek pre-literate and literate cultures, to put forward the notion that establishing the phonetic alphabet brought about a process which somehow "detribalized" the Greeks. In his introduction to the second edition of Understanding Media, McLuhan suggests:

> **Previously the Greeks had grown up by benefit of the process of the tribal encyclopedia. They had memorized the poets. The poets provided specific operational wisdom for all the contingencies of life -- Ann Landers in verse. With the advent of individual detribalized man, a new education was needed. Plato devised such a program for literate man. . . . With [the advent of] the phonetic alphabet, classified wisdom took over from the operational wisdom of Homer and Hesiod and the tribal encyclopedia. Education by classified data has been the Western program ever since.[34]**

Although he operates within a considerably different context, Nietzsche's words convey much the same set of ideas.

> Heretofore the Greeks had felt an instinctive need to relate their experience at once to their myth, indeed to understand it only through that connection. In this way, even the immediate present appeared to them . . . in a certain sense as timeless. The commonwealth, as well as art, submerged itself in that timeless stream in order to find respite from the burden and avidity of the immediate moment. It may be claimed that a nation, like an individual is valuable only in so far as it is able to give quotidian experience the stamp of the eternal. Only by so doing can it express its profound, if unconscious, conviction of the relativity of time and the metaphysical meaning of life. The opposite happens when a nation begins to view itself historically and to demolish the mythical bulwarks that surround it. The result is usually a definite secularization, a break with the unconscious metaphysic of its earlier mode of existence, with all the accompanying dismal moral consequences. Greek art, and specifically Greek tragedy, were the factors preventing the destruction of myth.[35]

Once Greek tragedy was dead, the orthodoxy underlying it killed and replaced by "the intense Socratism of science", the Greeks -- says Nietzsche -- engaged themselves in "feverish search" collecting myths and superstitions "at random", leading to "jollity and frivolity" or the "drug" of "crass Oriental superstition."[36] He compares that situation with conditions of his own time, in Germany, where there was

> the same extravagant thirst for knowledge, the same insatiable curiosity, the same drastic secularization, the romantic wandering, the greedy rush to alien tables, . . . symptoms pointing to a comparable lack in our own culture, which has also destroyed myth.[37]

Friedrich Nietzsche had German culture in mind, but he expressed his dictum on the loss of "healthy creativity" in terms which can probably be applied universally. Kerouac's documented interest in Nietzsche extended to his application of nietzschean aphorisms, such as "Art is the highest task and the proper metaphysical activity of this life", to himself.[38] He, along with William S. Burroughs and Allan Ginsberg, attempted to elaborate "the beginnings of a cyclical theory of history"[39] based on a fusion of Spengler, Nietzsche, and Yeats. A thorough familiarity with The Birth of Tragedy would have provided Kerouac with the tools to relate Nietzsche's theories on culture and creativity to the America of 1947-51 in much the same fashion as Nietzsche himself did both to his own time and to the time of the ancient Greeks.

Those early emigres Noble describes as dreaming of an American "redemption" were, after all, bringing with them the germplasm of myth from an ancient heritage. But Kerouac did more than apply a theoretical scheme of myth to the structure of his novel; he reached out from an established theory to import new ideas about what an American myth might contain. Then, with these incorporated ideas, he produced a new structure of myth for the American mind.

NOTES

[1] **David W. Noble,** The Eternal Adam and the New World Garden: The Central Myth of the American Novel Since 1830 (New York: George Braziller, 1968), p. x.

[2] **R. W. B. Lewis,** The American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century (Chicago:University of Chicago Press,1955), p.3.

[3] **Noble,** p. 5.

[4] **Noble,** pp. 4-5.

[5] **Frederick Jackson Turner,** The Frontier in American History (1920; reissue New York: Henry Holland Co., 1958), p. 6. [NOTE: Turner's essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History", was presented in 1893. Subsequently, it was published with other essays expanding on his thesis in the volume cited here. The material quoted is from that original essay of 1893 as it appears in this volume.]

[6] **Turner,** p. 3.

[7] **Henry Nash Smith,** Virgin Land: The American West As Symbol and Myth (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1950), p. 128.

[8] **Smith,** p. 129.

[9] **Smith,** pp. 129-130.

[10] **Turner**, p. 2.

[11] **Turner**, pp. 2-3.

[12] **Turner**, pp. 302-303.

[13] **Turner**, pp. v-vi.

[14] **Smith**, p. 128.

[15] **Smith**, p. 251.

[16] **Smith**, ibid.

[17] **Smith**, p. 255.

[18] **Richard Hofstadter**, The Progressive Historians: Turner, Beard Parrington (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1968), p. 87.

[19] **John Cawelti**, "God's Country, Las Vegas and the Gunfighter: Differing Visions of the West," Western American Literature, 9 (Winter 1975), p. 274.

[20] **Cawelti**, p. 275.

[21] **Jack Kerouac**, On The Road (New York: Penguin, 1976), p. 81. All subsequent references to this text appear in parentheses.

[22] **Joni Mitchell**, "The Big Yellow Taxi," (New York: Siquomb Publishing Co., 1970).

[23] **Gerald D. Nash**, The American West in the Twentieth Century: A Short History of an Urban Oasis (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), p. 226.

[24] **Friedrich Nietzsche**, The Birth of Tragedy and The Genealogy of Morals, trs. Francis Golffing (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday Anchor, 1956), p. 136.

[25] **Nietzsche**, p. 136.

[26] **Nietzsche**, p. 19.

[27] **Nietzsche**, p. 142.

[28] **Nietzsche**, p. 138.

[29] **Nietzsche**, p. 140.

[30] **Nietzsche**, p. 137.

[31] **Jack Kerouac**, "Origins of The Beat Generation," A Casebook on the Beat, ed. Thomas Parkinson (New York: Thomas Crowell, 1961), p. 57.

[32] **Nietzsche**, p. 138.

[33] **Eric Havelock**, Preface to Plato (Boston: Harvard University Press, 1963).

[34] **Marshall McLuhan**, Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man, 2nd. ed. (Toronto: New American Library, 1968), p. vii.

[35] **Nietzsche**, pp. 138-139.

[36] **Nietzsche**, p. 139.

[37] **Nietzsche**, p. 139-140.

[38] **Dennis McNally**, Desolate Angel: Jack Kerouac, the Beat Generation, and America (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1979), p. 73.

[39] **McNally**, p. 77.

Chapter 2: A Mythic Pattern

On The Road depends upon a strong, well recognized imaginative pattern in American literature for its structural unity. What follows in this chapter is a brief description of that pattern, and of its roots in American myth.

What can be meant by terms such as "imaginative patterns", or "mythic elements?" It seems clear there are apprehensions, even "basic truths", relating to the human experience which do endure as if in a shared "memory bank." Whether one enquires of the Nietzsche of 1871, of Sir James Frazer at the end of that century, or of C.G. Jung or Ruth Benedict in the 1930s; that is, whether from particular areas of philology, studies in comparative folklore, psychology, or anthropology, the answers are similar enough to be comparable. Some may call them archetypes, others stereotypes, still others customs, or myths; however named, these elements are inherited ideas or modes of thought which are shared by the members of a community. Theoretically, these ways of responding are derived from the experience of the community, the collectivity, to which the individual belongs, and they are even said to be present in the "unconscious." Just as these "patterns of culture" influence the behaviour of individuals within societies, so do they make possible a pattern of meaning and valuation which can be expressed symbolically through art.

Generally speaking, theories about cultural patterns are derived from the study of small and cohesive groups. Such matters become extremely complex when applied to vast and heterogeneous societies like America's. However, Benedict insists, the "life history of the individual is first and foremost an accommodation to the patterns and standards traditionally handed down in his community."[1] In that sense, no American looks at his world with "pristine eyes" because the stereotyped "ways of thinking" he has been given will have "edited" the scene before him prior to his first glance at it. Even so, due to the complexity of the American community, the likelihood that any more than a marginal number of individuals share a complete set of stereotypes, or that more than a few major stereotypes are shared by the mass of the population, is small. Yet, whenever a truly "national myth" becomes the underlying theme of a literary work, the potential exists for that work to express symbolically meanings of a widely understood and powerful kind. The rescue of "white womanhood" from the "black rapist", for example, was a novelist's theme before D.W. Griffith used it in his film **Birth of A Nation**. Despite the complex nature of American society, imaginative patterns do exist which are widely shared across the nation, and these are available for novelists to employ as underlying designs for their combinations of incidents. It is the felt recognition of these meaningful patterns underlying events in a novel which can at once give the work its unity, and, if the symbols, the craft, and the tone are right, its power.

The central pattern story around which On The Road is constructed has to do with chaste masculine love. As George Dardess has put it, "On The Road is a love story, not a travelogue,"[2] and yet there is nowhere within it any overt threat "to compromise an essential aspect of American sentimental life", which is "a kind of passionless passion . . . possessing an innocence above suspicion" that Leslie Fiedler attaches to "the camaraderie of the locker-room,"[3] and to all the other male-to-male social encounters which, in America, depend on innocence "assumed."

Innocent affection between American males is a theme in American literature which Fiedler finds to be a "genuinely mythic" formula, especially in its inter-racial form, "the mutual love of a white man and a colored."[4] Fiedler's emphasis, and the paradigms he chooses from 19th and 20th century novels (such as Natty Bumppo and Chingachgook, Ishmael and Queequeg, Huck and Nigger Jim, or McMurphy and Chief Bromden in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest)[5], serve to make his point that these relationships fit into "the impossible mythos"[6] (emotionally compelling, even though illogical and doomed to failure) of reconciliation which each generation of Americans plays out as children in the streets, but which becomes a receding dream when, as adults, the black and white one-time playmates turn away from each other.

This "mythos" of male togetherness is, however, more than nostalgia for boyhood's racial innocence, an appeal to which might somehow make psychic amends for the adult society's racial injustices. At least as deeply felt is something else which Fiedler insists children still discover in Cooper, something, he observes, it took a D.H. Lawrence to see clearly, "the childish impossible dream . . . the kid's Utopia: the absolute wilderness in which the stuffiness of home yields to the wigwam and 'My Wife' to Chingachgook."[7] That dream, Fiedler claims, is "implacable nostalgia for the infantile", because "the mythic America is boyhood."[8] Fiedler remarks that D. H. Lawrence found it "easier" to read in the American classics "a linked mythos of escape and immaculate male love"[9] because he was a foreigner. He didn't have to peer through or around any inherited nostalgia. Nor did he have to deal with any racial guilt of his own. Instead, he could be conscious of underlying meaning which gave such characteristic "shape" to America's "guilelessly" accepted "boy's books."

If, like Lawrence, one looks at these literary couples as personifications of innocent, though emotional, connections between males, they can be identified as emblems of a mythic, innocent America. Fiedler observes that there has been a "shift from a belief in Original Sin to one in Original Innocence . . . , that the same original disposition once called 'sin' was more properly labelled 'innocence'."[10] In our world, as a result, the child is often the "touchstone" in his "unfallen freshness of insight, his unexpended vigor, his incorruptible naivete", says Fiedler, or he may even become

> the hero himself: Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn or Holden Caulfield, the Good American, the unrecognized saint, living in a hogshead or thrown out of fashionable bars: the cornerstone the builders rejected, Christ as a J.D. [juvenile delinquent].[11]

This image has "impinged" itself so thoroughly on adult life that novelists like Kerouac are faced with having to delay their protagonists' psychological maturity, perhaps even to withhold it altogether. Although Fiedler's observation on this is a cutting one, it is also illuminating:

> The age of Kerouac's protagonists is just as ambiguous as that of Twain's though for quite the opposite reasons. Twain blurred adolescence back into boyhood to avoid confronting the problem of sex; the newer writers, accepting the confusion of boyhood and youth, blur both into manhood to avoid yielding up to maturity the fine clean rapture of childish "making out." The fictional counterparts of the . . . [h]ipsters have crossed the borderline of genital maturity, but in all other respects they have not left Jackson's Island.[12]

If Fiedler is right about these conflicting signals being given within the culture -- on the one side the innocence of immaculate masculine love, and on the other the child as the repository of innocence -- this situation would virtually preclude the presence of the mature male on centre stage in a novel like **On The Road**, which is itself concerned with reinvesting the myth of American innocence. But how could that be? It would mean a loving pair like Dean and Sal must fail in their search for America's Edenic innocence if either one matures, develops beyond an arrested adolescence. Yet, according to the American Dream as outlined in Chapter 1, the new Eden was open to all the Americans, and once within it they would regain their innocence while, supposedly, retaining their maturity. There appears to be a gap in logic between these two notions; what can account for it?

The best answer lies in the fact that Dean and Sal are faced with searching for an Eden that their mature, fully adult pioneer forebears either never did find or else despoiled as they tramped through it. Somehow, the hopes and dreams of the early romantics for the new Americans failed to take root because rural gardens got smothered by city "jungles". As was stated earlier (see pages 24 - 26), there were always inherent contradictions within the Frontier Thesis which meant that an agrarian civilization would never find stasis even if it could be established, since all societies, even those of Turner's "successive Wests", progressively develop through higher and higher stages. Mature people brought about a mature frontier. Thus, if someone like Sal or Dean rejects or finds fault with that maturity, doubt would be cast upon their own. And further, the search for an Eden in fallen America could only be undertaken by "arrested adolescence". Consequently, it follows that Fiedler's critique has considerable merit.

Fiedler also suggests another direction the development of a character might take, permitting innocence side by side with a kind of growth. Such growth would seem destined to be malignant or pernicious, however, since it involves crossing the "hard and wirey line" beyond sanity. Nevertheless, the old myth of the lonely White man bound by love to an Indian (or a colored) comrade may come to depend upon mental illness -- as was the case in **One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest**. Here, the madhouse became a new setting for "the old, old fable of the White outcast and the Noble

Red Man joined together against home and mother, against the female world of civilization."[13] Here, the Indian comrade, the savage our outcast encounters on his outward bound pathway, has become "the mad Indian comrade," and as such the savage now depends upon the outcast white man to guide the way to sanity. It's an inversion of the old myth, since the savage is lost in civilization. McMurphy sets the example that free spirits defy locked doors. But the hero's fate is tragedy. McMurphy suffers surgical removal of his free and easy nature. Witnessing McMurphy's fate prompts Chief Bromden to break out and run back to the ancestral hills, an assertion that a sense of spiritual freedom is still best sought outward bound, within the sane and lonely wilderness.

> **We have come to accept the notion that there is still a territory unconquered and uninhabited by palefaces, . . . and we have been learning that into this territory certain psychotics, a handful of "schizophrenics," have moved on ahead of us - unrecognized Natty Bumppos or Huck Finns.**[14]

Conducting some sort of dialogue with the mad, "just such a dialogue as their predecessors learned to conduct" with the original wilderness dwellers, may be necessary for "a myth of

America"[15] to continue in the work of American writers, Fiedler concludes. The idea leaves a pungent question in its wake: when did such a dialogue with the mad ever cease? Using the "hard and wirey line" of reality as the test, how balanced was Ahab? How sane was Jay Gatsby? For that matter, how rational was Dean Moriarty? Monomania took Gatsby to Long Island, Moriarty to the road across "that awful continent"[16], and Ahab to his fatal reunion. All three destinations amount to the same thing: isolation, being alone in life or in death. Thanatophobic America fears its disconnected destination. Excommunication must eventually come, either through illness, age and death, or dementia. It is the end-point for madmen too, whether they are innocent or not. L.S.D., the round trip ticket for a tourist's view of the territory beyond the "hard and wirey line", does not spell innocence for the "tourist" any more than schizophrenia does for the patient; however, they do both open the way to isolation, and isolation, by definition, can never be shared. That is the very rock upon which the relationship between Sal and Dean finally is smashed.

Yet, according to the American myth, innocent masculine love will redeem the outcasts, reestablish contact with the lost, and overcome their isolation; perhaps even the isolation of madness. Fiedler insists it is always in the role of "outcast" that the White American turns to love his dark fellow. Often, though not always, this same dark fellow will be a chief, perhaps even a royal prince, among his own people. Still, there are cases when the outcast turns for companionship to a buddy of his own race. The pair of Huck and Tom comes to mind. Perhaps the existence of clear contrasts between the partners is enough to maintain the paradigm. Contrasts may be needed simply to replace the sexual opposites of heterosexual couples. Dean and Sal, as a loving couple, conform to Fiedler's paradigm without being inter-racial. Although Sal thinks of Dean as "my brother"(p. 226), there are contrasts between them, perhaps the strongest being the matter of social status. While Sal thinks of himself as being, "in a way" (p. 97), a Mexican peon, he is more truly representative of White American bourgeoisie, continually worried about his money -- or his lack of it. By contrast, Dean is the product of America's underclasses. Although he is a white man, he is strongly associated with Negro life; in particular, he has a passion for jazz, "Black" music. He has some bourgeois friends among boys he grew up with in Denver, but he is "the son of a wino, one of the most tottering bums of Larimer Street" (p. 38), and he was raised along Denver's Larimer Street skid row. At best, he is a "beat" cowboy, and "in fact he'd just been working on a ranch" (p. 5). At worst, he is a "J.D.", as Fiedler puts it, or an ex-convict with "con-man" (p. 6) tendencies. Tim Hunt describes Dean as being very much like an older Huck Finn. "Like Huck, Dean relies on himself", while Sal is more like Tom Sawyer because he has a home, clean sheets, and a protective aunt who can always be relied on "to bail him out."[17] In the eyes of Sal's aunt, a representative of middle class values, "who took one look at Dean and decided that he was a madman" (p. 6), Dean was outcast from the start. In the sense that it heightens the contrast between them, her rejection helps set the stage for the emergence of Dean and Sal as a couple within the terms of Fiedler's, or Lawrence's, "linked mythos."

A flaw in this analysis is Dean's hardly being the classic outcast if those putting that stamp on him are middle-class types like Sal's aunt. If his status as the outcast is to count, he has to be rejected by everyone: especially by his own social class, by his family, and by his friends as well as by society in general. Only after he has been turned away from by America's underclasses, homosexuals, Negroes, and his fellow "Okies" can Dean be truly classed among the outcasts of America. He will be, finally, rejected by all save Sal(vatore). By becoming the outcast, he becomes isolated, "cut . . . off from all others."[18] To the extent that every American fears being isolated, spiritually alone, and unloved, afloat in an immense space of sea, of prairie, of forest, of city "jungle", of river reach, or of open road, Dean becomes the representative American.

To find Eden is to find a solution to isolation and loneliness through unreserved friendship and innocent love. Ever since Rip Van Winkle, Fiedler comments,

> **the typical male protagonist of American fiction has been a man on the run, harried into the forest and out to sea, down to the river or into combat -- anywhere to avoid "civilization", which is to say, the confrontation of a man and a woman which leads to the fall of sex, marriage, and responsibility.**[19]

Homosexual love, too, tends toward civilized responsibility when it becomes the inversion of heterosexual marriage. Regardless of gender, the "spouse" of an American male becomes, in the myth, "a mother of his own choice."[20] Whether to be isolated or to be civilized is the choice that must be made. Only the outcast may avoid the choice and link up with the equivalent of a noble savage to seek escape both from isolation, and from civilization, in the innocence of immaculate masculine love.

That, at least, was the 19th century theme. In the latter part of the 20th century, the theme becomes more a search for spiritual rescue out of reach of an ever more virulent civilization which may already have swamped the last savage, noble or not. This is the form the mythos takes in On The Road, where the suggestion Fiedler has made that the American myth may need to be rediscovered in a dialogue with madness seems, at least on the surface of things, to be exemplified. Something akin to madness becomes Dean's route to escape from 20th century civilization, but the price he pays is high, and his experience raises a question. While innocent, immaculate masculine love could survive the wilderness, and savagery, can it truly survive an escape into madness? And while the old pattern may have its meaning changed somewhat by the response to the question, the fact that the question is being raised seems to confirm the continuing shaping power of that grand old pattern within the American imagination.

NOTES

[1] **Ruth Benedict,** Patterns of Culture (1934; New York: Mentor, 1957), p. 2.

[2] **George Dardess,** "The Delicate Dynamics of Friendship: A Reconsideration of Kerouac's On The Road," American Literature, 40 (May 1974), p. 201.

[3] **Leslie A. Fiedler,** "Come Back to the Raft Ag'in, Huck Honey!", Partisan Review, 28 (1948), p. 665.

[4] **Fiedler,** p. 667.

[5] **Leslie A. Fiedler,** The Return of the Vanishing American (New York: Stein and Day, 1968), p. 182.

[6] **Fiedler,** "Come Back to the Raft . . . ", p. 671. Fiedler's "mythos" seems closely akin to Aristotle's (see p. 4 above).

[7] **Fiedler,** p. 668.

[8] **Fiedler,** p. 666.

[9] **Fiedler,** p. 669.

[10] **Leslie A. Fiedler,** "The Eye of Innocence," The Collected Essays of Leslie Fiedler: Vol. 1 (New York: Stein and Day, 1971), p. 474.

[11] **Fiedler,** p. 471.

[12] **Fiedler**, p. 494.

[13] **Fiedler**, The Return of the Vanishing American, p. 177.

[14] **Fiedler**, p. 185.

[15] **Fiedler**, p. 186.

[16] **Jack Kerouac**, On The Road (New York: Penguin, 1976), p. 226. All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses.

[17] **Tim Hunt**, Kerouac's Crooked Road: Development of a Fiction (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1981), p. 11.

[18] **Fiedler**, "Come Back to the Raft . . . ", p. 670.

[19] **Leslie A. Fiedler**, "The Novel in America", A Fiedler Reader (New York: Stein and Day, 1977), p. 134.

[20] **Fiedler**, "The Eye of Innocence", p. 483.

Chapter 3: **An American Superman**

As suggested earlier, On The Road draws its legendary nature from the causality provided by the mythic plot within Kerouac's narrative. Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty are an archetypal male couple on the run from American civilization. On The Road has been called "the Huckleberry Finn of the mid-twentieth century" in which Kerouac is said to have "substituted the road for the river, the fast car for the slow raft, [and] the hipster in search of freedom for the black slave in search of freedom."[1] Dean is presented as a romantic hero, a kind of "hip" superman. His superiority is characterized by his superabundance of energy. In the same manner, his characteristic activities are marked by his profligate expenditure of all that energy. Of this action, Sal is the observer, the one who reports it. Sal's account, then, becomes the legend of Dean Moriarty, the hipster saint; a legend incorporating the mythic elements Kerouac uses to propel Dean toward his probable and necessary destiny. What follows here is an examination of Sal's description of Dean, the

American superman, demonstrating how and why what Sal describes is mythic.

Dean is one of those beings, Sal explains,

> **who are mad to live, mad to talk, mad to be saved, desirous of everything at the same time, the ones who never yawn or say a commonplace thing, but burn, burn, burn like fabulous yellow roman candles exploding like spiders across the stars and in the middle you see the blue centerlight pop and everybody goes "Awww!"[2]**

Like those flaming fireworks, Dean consumes himself in his race through life.

Sal thinks of Dean, along with the other so-called "sordid hipsters of America" (p. 54), as being similar to "such young people of Goethe's Germany" (p. 8) who sought release by modelling themselves on Goethe's famous romantic hero, the self-destructive Young Werther. Sal admires, but can never quite identify completely with, the self-destructive hipsters. He has to satisfy himself instead with his observations. Compared to the "energies" of Dean and his friend Carlo Marx, for example, Sal considers himself "a lout" who "couldn't keep up with them" (p. 7), and who had to "shamble" after them as best he could.

According to Sal, "Dean . . . had the tremendous energy of a new kind of American saint" (p. 39). That is to say, Dean is Sal's illustrious example of how to live religiously, fully, each and every one of his allotted American moments. "'We know time'" (p. 159), Dean insists, and time is the enemy. His perception of time in America includes the idea that its passage can be slowed down, even stopped, by speeding up the perception of "every detail of every moment" (p. 120). He achieves his speedup of perception through his application of profligate energy, maniacal speed, ecstatic enthusiasm, and wild joy to virtually every aspect of his life in America. This endeavour often seems to have a frenzied devotion to it. Dean becomes so closely associated with this devoutly energetic approach to being American that, in the eyes of his followers at least, he is America. Thus it is that Carlo Marx can ask him "'Whither goest thou, America, in thy shiny car in the night?'" (p. 119), and be understood even though Dean can have no answer for the question. Dean's energetic approach to life in America is, at least in Sal's mind, something new. However, as Sal tells us the tale, Dean is more like a sort of reversion to some original American type, perhaps from frontier times. Dean's "wild yea-saying overburst of American joy" is like "something new, long prophesied, long a-coming" (p. 10). And his rage to live every moment to its fullest extent has about it a legendary quality, a characteristic of frontiersmen in the traditional stories from past times. Sal, by choosing to tell his tale in the form of a long monologue, reinforces a felt relationship with these legends.

Great feats of energy and endurance were the basis for many great legends. In a real sense, the legends of people like Kit Carson or Daniel Boon conferred upon them a kind of secular sainthood. It follows that the "tremendous energy" Dean exhibits, or radiates, helps establish him as "a new kind of American saint." Moreover, he is sainted because he embodies the great myths of America: freedom, rebirth, and time's transcendence. And then, through his sainthood, he has also "got the secret" (p. 195), the key to Eden's gate. Possession of the secret entitles him to let slip his social responsibilities, which in turn liberates extra energy within him, a tremendous sexual energy, for his race with time, that most intense manifestation of his sainthood.

Dean's embodiment of the great myths stems from his being "a western kinsman of the sun" (p. 10), from his western origins, from his "'criminality'" (p. 10), from his status as an outcast, and from his eventual metamorphosis into a being which Sal comes to refer to as an "Angel" (p. 263), a being which may be either a childlike adult, a madman, or something else. Whatever he is, he has the essence of freedom in him, and "it was Western, the west wind, an ode from the Plains" (p. 10). He is also "new" because in Sal's observations he appears able to cross America's racial barriers in an effortless manner, and to enjoy rapport with nearly every Black he meets. In this sense, he is representative of a White America reborn out of its racist past. A key symbol for this rebirth is jazz, which itself is allegorical for breaking up and reformulating patterns from America's musical heritage. Dean recharges his energies through his ecstatic reactions to jazz. It is as if he takes from the atmosphere in the places where this music is played some special essence of life that provides him with an antidote to the sorrow and entropy of a sick and worn out society. It's a society unable to accommodate Dean's presence. Even his friends begin to feel overawed at the prospect of his "imminent arrival" in their midst. As a consequence, in Sal's hyperbole,

> [w]e didn't know what to expect. "Where will he sleep? What's he going to eat? Are there any girls for him?" It was like the imminent arrival of Gargantua; preparations had to be made to widen the gutters of Denver and foreshorten certain laws to fit his suffering bulk and bursting ecstasies. (p. 259)

It is the effort Dean expends to find a way to time's transcendence which gives his legend its greatest appeal. Dean's run against time reshapes him even as it shapes his legend. It seems to project him back into a form of childhood. As pointed out earlier (p. 47), Fiedler has suggested that childhood in America has a kind of sentimental sainthood attached to it. But, an adult who relapses back into childhood again quickly becomes an object of pity. Such a one has become lost in time, as if disconnected somehow from a reference to progress through a real lifetime. To be lost in time is to be considered, at best, silly or senile; at worst, insane. When, finally, Dean puts on a "motheaten overcoat" (p. 309) for his last visit with Sal in cold New York, his successful transcendence of time means he now has the appearance of one who has indeed become lost in time. He has become the "Shrouded Traveller on the plain" (p. 259), that embodiment of the American spirit abroad forever in the American night. Or else, he has become just another ragged and weary runaway child returning to his mother. Or, he is merely wearing "the forlorn rags of growing old" (p. 310). There is no question as to which of these he is, or has become, because he truly is all three at once. As this analysis will attempt to show, his race with time projects him into a mental state of being father to his daughters (and perhaps to Sal), a son to his wife, and a "holy" spirit wandering in the night, all at the same time. It is as if he has found a way to move outside the usual time frame for experience onto a plane of transcendence where life's various stages have melded. However, he is alone in attaining this new mental plane. Sal merely observes his friend's transition to it; he cannot or will not follow Dean through the gateway to Eden. Even so, his observations of Dean's transition can give some hints on how and why it occurs.

As described above, Dean's transcendence is about something that has happened in his mind, a transition from one way of being to another. That transition is the product of three interlinked forces. As we have seen, the first, and driving force, is Dean's superabundance of energy. The second force, that which stems from Dean's explosive energy expenditure, is a process. It seems to consume his former self bit by bit. By passage as if through a fiery ablation comes his growing isolation from -- or contrast with -- everyone else, including, eventually, his bard Sal. And finally, the third and most important of these three forces, the one which propels Dean into his ultimate personality even as it recharges his energies and hastens his growing isolation, is his possession of "IT", the ability to ignore the passage of time by living completely and fully within the moment. By holding onto the moment, by mentally stepping outside the passage of time, he spirals into his "undevelopment." As he concentrates more effort in his contest to win and hold "IT", the transcendence he achieves recharges him even as it further isolates him as he reaches yet again for more of "IT", for more and more control of time itself.

What exactly does Sal witness as Dean's transition into a new being, a saint or angel standing at Eden's Gate, occurs? As described earlier (see page 65), Dean's race against time gradually reshapes the way he appears to Sal and to the rest of the watching gang of friends. Sal's descriptions of him are quite often expressed in terms of movie stars, America's Olympians. In

Part One, for example, Sal's "first impression of Dean was of a young Gene Autrey--trim, thin-hipped, blue-eyed, with a real Oklahoma accent"(p.5). Somewhat later on in Part Two, Sal observes that Dean "rushed out of the car like Groucho Marx to get cigarettes--that furious ground-hugging walk with the coattails flying, except that he had no coattails" (p. 120). Dean is determined to hang onto every fleeting moment by staying out of reach of snags, like jail, where he could become "hung-up." His determination on this point, Sal observes, had led to "these . . . first days of his mysticism, which would lead to the strange, ragged W. C. Fields saintliness of his later days" (p. 121).

Much later, in Part Four, during a visit back in Denver, a party is thrown in his honour. Dean, on this occasion,

> **held the whole floor. He stood and performed before Shephard [sic], Tim, Babe, and myself, who all sat side by side in kitchen chairs along the wall. . . ."Hup! hup!" Dean was saying, tugging at his shirt, rubbing his belly, jumping up and down. "Yass, well--we're all together now and the years have rolled severally behind us and yet you see none of us have really changed." (p. 262)**

Caught up in his pursuit of each moment, Dean does not comprehend change. But those ranged along the wall, watching him, are very much aware of the changes in Dean. One of his friends observes that he "'gets crazier every year, don't he?'" (p. 262).

This change, which is steadily overtaking Dean, has a mystical radiance to it, and its components are clearly mythic. He is becoming ever more strongly associated with the mythic America. His adult selfhood as Dean is melting away with the heat of his superman's energy. What is being left in its place is no longer himself, or his dream of himself. Rather, it is as if Dean has translated himself into a larger consciousness. To Sal, the bard, his Dionysus has at last been transposed from man to angel, if not to a god. To all the other watchers, however, Dean is becoming increasingly childish, or is simply crazy:

> **And he stood swaying in the middle of the room, eating his cake and looking at everyone with awe. He turned and looked around behind him. Everything amazed him, . . . he tore at his T-shirt in exclamation, "Damn!" He had no idea of the impression he was making and cared less. People were now beginning to look at Dean with maternal and paternal affection glowing in their faces. He was finally an Angel, as I always knew he would become. (p.263)**

In other words, while Dean's "W.C. Fields' saintliness" is rather like a reversion to childhood, it also marks the transition Dean has been making to an altered plane of awareness. Dean's "Angel" in Part Four is quite a contrast to his "hero of the snowy West" image in Part One. Dean's "mysticism" spirals his development in a reverse direction. He becomes an "undone bird" (p. 189). His insistence on remaining as long as he can within each moment in time, rather than in accepting an uninterrupted stream of moments through his life, means that his friends grow older -- because for them, time's flowing stream washes through their lives -- while he appears to become relatively younger as he rafts along all by himself out on that big river of time. It is as if some of the effects predicted in the relativity theory, applicable when speeds approach that of light, are being expressed through Dean's metamorphosis.

At the start of Sal's tale about his energetic hero, he tells us that Dean "was simply a youth tremendously excited with life" (p. 6). Yet, even then, Sal insists, "a kind of holy lightning" (p. 7) flashed around him. Even though Dean had to work a hard eight hours like any ordinary mortal, there remained something special about him. His "every muscle twitched to live and go" (p. 114), and even at that early point in his legend he already believed that every moment was precious. On this point, Sal claims, Dean became mystical, "tremendously excited about everything he saw, everything he talked about, every detail of every moment that passed. He was out of his mind with real belief" (p. 120). Amidst the lightning flashes, Dean's sexual energy was "explosive" (p. 112), and he had a reputation for "'sleeping with three girls at the same time'" (p. 46). He was a "hurricane of energy" (p. 175), at any moment "all energies and ready to do" (p. 155) the next run, the next drive, or the next "allday-allnight-talk" (p. 8). In this manner, Dean was "running through all of life" (p. 154), and at the same time was poised to rise "to the stars" (p. 217).

Later on, in the course of the events he witnesses, Sal becomes fully aware of the other side to Dean's hurricane image. This "flip side" image, so startling to normal people like Sal's aunt, categorized Dean instantly in their eyes as being either a criminal, a monster, or a lunatic. Running with the hurricane, like a storm-blown ship, in "a motherless, feverish life across America and back numberless times" (p. 189), Dean exhibited "such obvious frenzy everybody could guess his madness" (p. 225). It was as if, like another time-transiting spirit, The Flying Dutchman, he was a marked man. For example, as pointed out earlier in Chapter 2, all Sal's aunt needs is "one look at Dean" (p. 6) to be convinced he is mad.

As his tale progresses, nobody was left "in the world to believe in him" (p. 217) except Sal. Dean's having become a marked man results in his becoming outcast. His own family either was lost to him, or was in the process of disowning him. He can't find his father anywhere. What is left of his family in Denver wants absolutely nothing to do with Dean anymore, and one of them, Sam Brady, brings a paper from the family for Dean to sign which will separate him from them, all because Sam "was suspicious of his young cousin" (p. 216). Dean's foster brother Ed Wall, the Colorado cowboy, "had lost faith in Dean just like Sam Brady--he looked at him warily when he looked" (p. 229) during their last meeting. In this business transaction, Dean's initial image in Sal's eyes, his cowboy connection, gets broken.

Dean also manages to demolish his relationships with an "Okie" community in Denver. A streak of car thefts which brings the attention of the Police Department onto his friends, and a botched sexual advance directed at a young girl in the community, drive him out. "'If that woman with the shotgun ever finds out, we're cooked,' said Dean" (p. 223), whose hurricane spirit of nonconformism is viewed by these others as criminal, not innocent. This is the case because, among the "straight" people of America, the insiders, Dean's mad expenditure of energy is clearly excessive, because it is generally conducted in a manner oblivious to its cost to others caught in its vortex, and because it almost always has criminal nuances to it. In another example, Sal tells of a confrontation with a "mean cop" in Virginia who "took an immediate dislike to Dean; he could smell jail all over him" (p. 135).

Nonetheless, even at this point, Sal does continue to believe, and to follow Dean, because these "nuances" are also about freedom. And despite the growing contrast between them, they still retain the ability to communicate with each other in deeply sincere ways. Thus, Sal is committed to observe, and to report on, the continued "undevelopment" of Dean. By and large, Sal's reports are about these contrasts.

Before Westerner Dean's arrival in his life in Part One, Sal's only experience has been Eastern. He knows the New Jersey mill towns, and he knows New York City, but his "life hanging around the campus had reached the completion of its cycle and was stultified" (pp. 9-10). He says he felt that "everything was dead" (p. 3). His gloomy perspective is compounded by the fact that all his "New York friends were in the negative, nightmare position of putting down society and giving their tired bookish or political or psychoanalytical reasons." By contrast, Dean "just raced in society, eager for bread and love" (p. 10). In this comparison, Sal is actually making an assessment of the "intellectualness" of his life in New York, and he finds that it is "tedious." Taken in that context, the coming of Dean to New York is an event which blows the hinges off the mental traps that Sal and his friends are caught up in. Their fashionable gloom is challenged. Dean offers them "a new horizon" (p. 10), and Sal was not the only one in his "scattered gang" (p. 8) of New Yorkers to follow Dean into the West that next spring in response to his challenge.

In vivid contrast to what Sal has known, Dean's petty criminality is like a fresh breeze stirring through a muggy afternoon.

Suddenly, like the springtime, there is a new promise in the air, a promise of "new experiences" (p. 9), perhaps even some new visions. Consequently, a better way to account for, or to describe, the thrust of Dean's impact would be to say that it is non-conformist or anti-establishment. It was never "anti-intellectual" as at least one of Kerouac's early critics has claimed[3], which is to entirely miss Sal's (or Kerouac's) points of contrast.

Sal, in fact, goes to some lengths to show how Dean once aspired to become "a real intellectual" (p. 6). That seems to have been the prime reason for Dean's arrival in New York in the first place. He was following friends of his from Denver who were studying in New York. He wanted to learn "all about Nietzsche and all the wonderful intellectual things" (p. 4) that these friends of his were studying. Sal tells us that at this stage Dean was still "a young jailkid shrouded in mystery" (p. 4). Instead of college, he has been to reform school, and has not had the same opportunities as these others, people like Chad King and Tim Gray, who grew up with him in Denver. Dean, it seems, is also very ambitious about learning how to write. Chad sends Dean to

Sal, since "I was a writer and he should come to me for advice" (p. 4). Sal notes how Dean

> really didn't know what he was talking about; that is to say, he was a young jailkid all hung-up on the wonderful possibilities of becoming a real intellectual, and he liked to talk in the tone and using the words, but in a jumbled way . . . although, mind you . . . it took him just a few months . . . to become completely in there with all the terms and jargon (p. 6).

All in all, "tired bookish" talk, in Dean's mouth, would not have interested Sal for long. Rather, it is the dark side of Dean, his "criminality," his impulsiveness, and his capacity for living the instinctive life which attract Sal's attention. "We understood each other on other levels of madness" (p. 6), Sal claims, and it is Dean's habitual confidence-man approach, no doubt picked up in jail, with him "conning me and I knew it . . . , and he knew I knew", which becomes the basis for their "relationship" (p. 7). Within that framework of understanding, Sal reports, "I began to learn from him as much as he probably learned from me" (p. 7).

It was this exchange, based on unspoken understandings, and on a camaraderie which Sal at least thinks is free of pretence, that allows Sal to begin to see in Dean "a kind of holy lightning . . . flashing from his excitement and his visions, which he described so torrentially" (p.7). The contrasted image Kerouac creates is of rocket-powered Dean, his shining personage like a moth-bedazzling light, dancing his way into the American night with Sal Paradise shambling along behind. As Carole Vopat has expressed it, together they are "pilgrims in search of all the IT America has to offer, seekers after Paradise and Salvation, as Sal's name suggests, [where] Denver and San Francisco are . . . respectively, 'the Promised Land' and 'the greater vision.'"[4] Together they mean to experience "IT" by "leaving confusion and nonsense behind and performing [their] one and noble function of the time, move" (p.133).

"IT" forms the very kernel of that substance which gives rise to Dean the superman. In the context of Dean's world, "IT" represents an upwelling, ecstatic response to life. Dean's finest efforts to grasp and to explain his relationship to "IT", his perception of time slowed down enough to allow the fullest possible experience of every detail of every moment, are associated with jazz. Over and over again, Dean finds "IT" by getting caught up in the frenzy of jazz improvisation and spontaneity. These rituals renew religious faith for the Dionysiac Dean, whose moral imperative is never "to get hung up"(p.120).

In Part Three, Sal describes one of these scenes. Everything revolves around two San Francisco saxophonists who enthral Dean with the energy and spontaneity of their "bebop" jazz style. The first player is a tenorman in little Harlem:

> **Dean was in a trance. The tenorman's eyes were fixed straight on him; he had a madman who not only understood but cared and wanted to understand more and much more than there was, and they began dueling for this; everything came out of the horn. (p. 198)**

Then, Dean and Sal catch a ride to Jamson's Nook where "a little short Negro with an alto horn" transfixes Dean for the second time that night:

> **His tone was clear as a bell, high, pure, and blew straight in our faces from two feet away. Dean stood in front of him, oblivious to everything else in the world, with his head bowed, his hands socking in together, his whole body jumping on his heels and the sweat, always the sweat, pouring and splashing down his tormented collar to lie actually in a pool at his feet. (p. 201).**

All the energy from this dissonant, dithyrambic music serves to recharge Dean's energies, and the sweating is one of his characteristic responses to the ecstasy of "IT".

A few hours later, Dean tells Sal how "'that alto man last night had IT--he held it once he found it; I've never seen a guy who could hold so long.'" Sal seizes his chance, and asks what "IT" means:

> **"Ah well"--Dean laughed--"now you're asking me impon-derables--ahem! Here's a guy and everybody's there, right? Up to him to put down what's on everybody's mind. He starts the first chorus, then lines up his ideas . . . and then he rises to his fate and has to blow equal to it. All of a sudden . . . he gets it--everybody looks up and knows; they listen; he picks it up and carries. Time stops. He's filling empty space with the substance of our lives. . . . He has to blow across bridges and come back and do it with such infinite feeling soul-exploratory for the tune of the moment that everybody knows it's not the tune that counts but IT--" Dean could go no further; he was sweating telling about it.(p.206)**

Just thinking about the little jazzman who had "IT", and who could stop time dead in its tracks, can recharge Dean's ecstasies.

However, jazz is not the only means to "IT." Like the horn player who grooves on some recapitulation of "old blowing", some sudden musical remembrance, Dean can approach "IT" again by telling a story of his youth, about his old bum of a father trying "'to sell flyswatters'" (p.207). He can also recognize "IT" in musicians other than jazzmen. In New York a few months earlier, Dean had met "the wild, ecstatic Rollo Greb." This fellow was also a music enthusiast, and who better than a musician would know time. Sal describes the scene as follows:

> Dean stood before him with head bowed, repeating over and over again, "Yes . . . Yes . . . Yes." He took me into a corner. "That Rollo Greb is the greatest, most wonderful of all. That's what I was trying to tell you--that's what I want to be. I want to be like him. He's never hung-up, he goes every direction, he lets it all out, he knows time, . . . Man, he's the end! You see, if you go like him all the time you'll finally get it."
>
> "Get what?"
>
> "IT! IT! I'll tell you--now no time, we have no time now." Dean rushed back to watch Rollo Greb some more. (p. 127)

Dean always bows respectfully when in the presence of "IT." The key to "IT" is knowing time, "'how to slow it up'" (p. 252), and how to stop it (time stops for the man who has "IT").

No matter how well Dean may recognize "IT", however, nor even how well he understands what **he** means when he uses the word in this particular way, he is unable to articulate that meaning clearly. Therefore it is up to Sal to break through -- to actually experience enough "IT" to enable him to decode the thing. Perhaps the closest he comes to achieving such an insight occurs in chapter 5 of Part Three. As James Boyle has so usefully shown, "more and more we find that Sal is taking on the status of Dean's disciple."[5] This discipleship is quasi-religious. When Sal first knew Dean, his teacher-to-be was still trying to reach ecstasy through wild and intense effort, the expenditure of energy discussed above. But now, Dean has begun to change, to move into a mode of being in which he can achieve his desired ecstatic moment of "IT" through contemplative acts. Boyle in fact suggests that Dean's entire "development" can be seen in that light -- a development "from the sensual to the contemplative approach to ecstasy."[6] For want of better terms, his approach to "IT" becomes like a religious practice.

On this occasion, Sal and Dean are once again embarked on a cruise across the nation, the trip actually starting right after the contemplation in the jazz episode described above. Once in the car, Dean carries on with his contemplating which now takes the form, as Boyle puts it, of "childhood travelling fantasies,"[7] a contemplation that Sal suddenly finds himself capable of emulating.

He begins to share Dean's fantasies, even adding to them, as they imagine themselves levelling the trees, posts and hills with a giant scythe, or running beside the car at incredible highway speeds. In that instant, both buddies -- for perhaps the one and only time in the novel -- achieve "IT" as a shared experience.

> **We were telling these things, and both sweating. We had completely forgotten the people up front who had begun to wonder what was going on in the back seat. At one point the driver said, "For God's sakes, you're rocking the boat back there." Actually we were; the car was swaying as Dean and I swayed to the rhythm and the IT of our final excited joy in talking and living to the blank tranced end of all innumerable riotous angelic particulars that had been lurking in our souls all our lives.(p. 208)**

The **blank tranced end**; unfortunately, that's the best Sal can do to describe the condition of mind he experiences. Something about "IT" cuts off useful verbal description. Nevertheless, Sal is offering a clue. He reveals "IT" in terms that are quasi-religious even as the story he tells sketches out the purest kind of childish pranks, goof-offs, and imaginative play. Children experience time's passage differently from the way adults do. For one thing, the hours and years pass more slowly for the child. And, for the child at play, time may not appear to pass at all. Larking about in the back seat, Dean and Sal have tapped back into their childhood memories and imaginations. In that transitory mental state, they achieve "IT". In the simplest of terms, then, time stops when you are having fun!

Dean's goal, it seems, is to reach a plane where time is washed out completely by his sweating ecstasy. Nor does he ever miss a chance to further explore the territory of the timeless. He cannot resist joining Sal for his trip to Mexico in Part Four, even though it means tearing up his settled life in New York. This new trip is related to the exploration of new kinds of music and new kinds of people who still live tribal lives. The trip is a promise of a flight "down the curve of the world into other tropics and other worlds" (pp. 265-266), where time will at last be conquered in a "timeless" land. "'Man, this will finally take us to IT!' said Dean with definite faith. He tapped my arm. 'Just wait and see. Hoo! Whee!'" (p. 266). But, despite his hopes, he and his disciple fail to take the fullest advantage of this new opportunity. When Sal falls ill, Dean decides to follow his fun -- which means he must abandon his friend. It's a betrayal, true, but that event allows Sal the bard to achieve a full understanding of his hero -- to see him fully revealed, and thus to learn to forgive him and to accept him in all his phases of transition. Sal now also finds his own authenticity.

As the narrative reaches Part Five, Dean makes his last appearance. In his ultimate form, though still capable of a three-hour monologue about his life in California, he is unable to "REALLY tell" what is on his mind since it is now apparent that he and Sal have lost their earlier almost magical capacity for understanding each other. As Sal describes him under these new circumstances,

> **he couldn't talk any more. He hopped and laughed, he stuttered and fluttered his hands and said, "Ah--ah--you must listen to hear." We listened, all ears. But he forgot what he wanted to say. "Really listen--ahem. Look, dear Sal--sweet Laura--I've come--I'm gone--but wait--ah yes." And he stared with rocky sorrow into his hands. "Can't talk no more--do you understand that it is--or might be--But listen." We all listened. He was listening to sounds in the night. "Yes!" he whispered with awe. "But you see--no need to talk any more--and further." (pp. 306-307)**

He doesn't know why he came to New York this last time. The letter which awaits him there, from Camille, "his most constant, most embittered, and best-knowing wife" (p. 308), seems written to a simple person, as if Dean is less her husband than her third child. She "'gave permission'" (p. 307) for this trip east, and in a mothering manner she writes as if to a wandering, best loved, son: "'My heart broke when I saw you go across the tracks with your bag. I pray and pray you get back safe. . . . I know you'll make it but I can't help worrying. . . . Welcome [back] with love and kisses . . .'" (p. 308), and so on, clearly implying that his independence has fallen into her grasp. She is mothering him, a situation befitting one who has become so childlike. He never asked a woman's permission to travel before this. He has traded in his masculine authenticity. He has, in fact, placed himself within a matriarchal setting for his contemplation of paradise.

Dean's visit with Sal is a failure. The two find themselves unable now to reach any sort of mutual accord. Of all things, Sal has a girl friend, and this fact of his new "fallen" status poses complications. And at the same time, Sal's other friends have plans which don't have room in them for "an idiot." (p. 309) And so, Sal's last sight of Dean, who is "bent to it again" travelling back to the West, is of a pathetic and lonely figure "ragged in a motheaten overcoat" (p. 309). Dean's pursuit of "IT", that world within the ecstatic moment, has led to his becoming a child lost in the American night, wearing the cloak from Sal's nightmare of the Shrouded Traveller. Sal's last image of his friend is of one who has risked everything, including his own individuality and independence, for a sight of paradise.

All the growing contrasts between these two buddies culminate when they finally become estranged from each other, an estrangement that completes Dean's isolation. The American superman wins his vision, but the price is that he cannot share it. By now, Sal can neither comprehend Dean's visions nor his descriptions of them. He is left with the belief that his friend has become "an angel," a term denoting the contemplative, quasi-religious nature of Dean's final form. But Sal's capacity to communicate with the full-blown angelic Dean cannot withstand the differences. It breaks down. With that break has come Dean's tragic isolation inside a ragged hobo's coat.

Sal does not need to follow Dean any further. Sal is the storyteller, and he has moved more fully into a syntactic mode in a verbal world, while Dean's world is one either of action, or of contemplation, and he is becoming a less verbal person. Beside that, Sal has his own new status, has united with a woman, and has turned his back on [apropos of Fiedler] Dean's four-wheeled wigwam. Sal's move away from Dean's new contemplative approach to ecstasy means that his final rejection of Dean has at last come and with it has come the isolation of Dionysus within Socratic America. Isolation cannot be shared and in the end it matters little whether Dean's has come to him through enlightenment, insanity, or apotheosis.

Sal has moved toward full maturity and patriarchal responsibility. In the light of America's mythic history, his movement places him more within the anti-feminine social order that America has taken for itself in preference to the Edenic hope once held out for it. Dean, on the other hand, chooses Eden. He regresses into a childlike innocence, and in that fashion he at last approaches the Gate. Does this ragged and forlorn figure stand then, at long last, as the embodiment of the American Dream? If so, is he victor, or vanquished? He is a hobo and he is timeless, landless, unstable, immature, insecure, irresponsible, friendless, cut off, isolated, and lost. Yet, he stands at Eden's Gate. But is his destination, then, the same one the founding fathers had thought of as the ennobling and worthy American Dream? If so, its realization must come as a great shock to the insiders who still seek God's approval through the size of their bank balances.

Sal is aware, however, that Dean has become something new, an American "angel". With that awareness he has set out like Paul the apostle, or like Ishmael the survivor, to tell a tale of truth -- the life-line he can live with -- the gospel as he knows it. He remembers the lessons taught to him by old Angel Dean. It was he who showed Sal how Mexican Indian children, born into the warmth of extended family care and tribal timelessness, are "'never alone'"(p. 280); whereas Sal knows that everywhere across the country the American babies "must be crying in the land where they let [them] cry" (p.309), because that is the process the scientific society uses to individuate its members, and to induct them into a world of time. Sal also knows it was Dean who made a gift of time to those timeless Mexican Indian children (pp.298-99), and who then made a prophesy that the tribal children would run all the way to Mexico City one day, that in effect they too would choose to live in a world of time rather than continue in their timelessness. Symbolically, Dean has tried to trade places with them, and perhaps, in this, he succeeds. He gives one Indian girl his wrist watch as if he would exchange his time-bound world for her timeless one. In exchange, she gives him a handful of clear and ageless crystals devoid of use or meaning in a world of time.

What would men learn without time as their teacher? Dean and Sal each seek to learn something from time, but their approaches are completely different. According to Aristotle, time "is both made continuous by the 'now' and divided at it,"[8] which makes "now" an end and a beginning of time. The Romans represented that truth by their god of the doorway, Janus, always represented with his two faces -- facing both forward and backward at the same time -- signifying his knowledge of both the past and the future. For Sal, "now" is the doorway to change, and to his growth both as a person and storyteller, in a verbal world. His growth and maturity stem from his lessons about change. Dean, instead, seeks his lesson like a "wrangler" astride that rapidly moving shadow's edge on the sundial of time. What he learns there shapes him into an "angel" and a child, a "'child of the rainbow'" (pp. 47-48), but leaves him diminished as an ostensible adult by what he has foregone in the way of experience within the human condition -- inevitable change.

Those who chose to come to America from old world Europe were trying to escape the pain and guilt they were born into. Tribal/national hatreds, periodic wars, penury and victimization from fixed class structures, and the visitation of the sins of the fathers upon the sons, generation after generation, drove them to seek absolution in a new world. One great result of all this was a tremendous capacity in the Americans to always look forward, and to anticipate themselves as creatures of the future, never of the past. Henry Ford said history was "bunk", and deep in their hearts the Americans of modern times agreed with him.

However, Kerouac and his friends, in the period just after the Second World War, were looking into ways to understand the history their fellow Americans would cast into oblivion. Kerouac himself had sprung from a cultural group that today takes pride in its history -- and that even goes to the length of printing on its license plates the slogan Je Me Souviens, "I Remember." Kerouac was known as "The Great Rememberer" by his friends -- people like Allen Ginsberg, for example; and as a youngster, within his family, he was called "memory babe." And then, as a novelist, he created Sal, chronicler of Dean Moriarty. Sal is -- as such -- both bard and historian. In this mode, Kerouac undermines the collective amnesia of his society, and reminds those with ears to hear Sal's monologue that they, as he is, are oriented in time. To be committed to the future, as the sons and daughters of the westering Americans tend to be, means commitment to the results of an historic process. The future must be understood in terms of the past. America has traded the timelessness of Dionysus for the future-facing Janus. Kerouac, through Sal's monologue, simply tries to remind America that Janus has two faces.

It is within that context, of America trying to blindfold one face of Janus without blotting out the sight of the other -- of an America seeking to know time without keeping a memory of its passage -- that Sal's monologue about Dionysus' American epic of isolation is recited. The timelessness of Dionysus, that dying and reviving god of Greek tribal life of which Dean's edenic career and final rapture are representative, was to have been the utopia America's yeomen would find and found in the "waiting west." Instead, the yeomanry sought a doorway through time into a better and brighter future. And perhaps they might have thought that if the sun shining in that California future was bright enough, their future could be held onto without having to pay the cost of a guilty past.

Thus it is that both Sal and Dean are admirable, compared with the yeomen. Both characters make choices about time, and their relationship to it, which seem more responsible than society's choice. Both characters appear to be prepared to pay the prices which come with their choices. By adopting the Janus-like stance of the poet, and relating both to the past and the present, Sal attains the gift of double vision -- full knowledge of Dean's future from the vantage of the past, and full knowledge of his history from the hind-sight of the future. However, he pays the price of the fall into a love/sexual relationship with a woman, and of the responsibility this entails. Dean, on the other hand, retains his dionysian approach to life in timelessness. He seeks "IT", the capacity to stop time. To the extent that Dean achieves "IT", he reverts to a childlike, sexless, lonely angelhood of contemplation.

By choosing to live every passing moment in the fullest terms of the American myths of freedom, rebirth, and time's transcendence, Dean achieves what may well be a transcendental experience for himself; an unspoken, rhapsodic entry to paradise.

It is, however, an achievement he can never hope to share. The attainment of his rapture must inevitably place him in isolation. Perhaps that has to be the destiny of any American superman.

NOTES

[1] **Aaron Latham**, "Visions of Cody," New York Times Book Review, 28 January 1973, pp. 42-43.

[2] **Jack Kerouac**, On The Road (New York: Penguin, 1976), p. 8. All subsequent references to this text appear in parentheses.

[3] **Norman Podhoretz**, "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," Partisan Review 25 (1958) pp. 305 - 318. In this famous diatribe, Podhoretz says the "Bohemians" of On The Road carry a message to "kill the intellectuals."

[4] **Carole Vopat**, "Jack Kerouac's On The Road: A Re-evaluation," Midwest Quarterly, 14 (Summer 1973), p. 395.

[5] **James Boyle**, "'IT! IT!' - On The Road As Religion," Recovering Literature: A Journal of Contextual Criticism, Vol. 15 (Summer 1987), p.32.

[6] **Boyle**, p. 33.

[7] **Boyle**, p. 34.

[8] **Aristotle,** "Physics," trs. R.P. Hardie and R.K. Gage, in The Works of Aristotle: Vol. 1, Great Books of the Western World 8, ed. R.M. Hutchins (Chicago: Encyclopedia Britannica, 1952), p. 299. Berlin No. 220a 5.

Chapter 4: Dean's Satori As American Myth

What has been attempted, to this point, was to draw together those elements of American mythology that are identifiable within On The Road. There are, as we have thus seen, many of these elements; and we have also seen how the structure of the work itself strongly depends on them for its cohesiveness. All of this demonstrates the thesis that the novel is mythic, and this essay should perhaps be concluded at this juncture. However, that would beg at least one pivotal question: although we now know approximately what "IT" is -- to achieve a mental space where time is wrung out and forgotten (like the mind of a child while having fun playing an absorbing game) -- how do we account for the ravaging effect "IT" appears to have had on Dean's personage as Sal describes it near the end of the novel? "IT" was earlier said to be Dean's goal in life. Why, then, if he has achieved that goal, has he become such an "undone bird?"

In fact, the issue of "IT" is hardly settled at all, as yet. We know vaguely what it is, perhaps how to get it, and why it's important in both the development of Dean and in the structure of the novel. But, we have not actually accounted for the condition of "IT." That is the task undertaken in this chapter.

Clearly, as the first three chapters have demonstrated here, the traditions of well-known and understood American mythology are at work in this novel. An appreciation of their implications permits critical awareness of how and why Dean's image is so powerful. His image is, in itself, mythic. Not only has its creation drawn upon the "wellsprings" of American myth, but in nietzschean terms its realization helps give America's "quotidian experience the stamp of the eternal" and even proposes a "metaphysical meaning of life" (see p. 36). Thus, Dean's lightning image may well be affecting the perception America has of itself, now and into the future. That surely is what is expected of myth.

There remains, however, this additional layer of myth that gives the necessary substance to Dean's new myth of "IT". As Kerouac's readers are aware, he had a strong interest in Zen. **The Dharma Bums**, of course, deals at some length with Zen influences on West Coast intellectuals of the early 1950's. Unexpectedly, however, we are about to discover how Zen also lies at the heart of On The Road, and why Zen -- the mystical expression of the ultimate West (that which lies out beyond the Pacific horizon) -- must therefore be taken into account. Doing so will require some additional examination both of the religious aspects of "IT" identified by James Boyle, and of how and why certain aspects of Dean's image correspond with aspects of Zen.

Sal's perception of Dean's attempts to transcend time, to achieve in his history that great 19th century romantic prescription held out for the American yeomanry as their myth -- that they too would transcend time -- are associated with Jazz and Black people; with fast long-distance driving and spatial perception; with the "Fellahin Indians" and the poor. For Dean, however, that transcendence was incorporated into his sense of "IT" which was something marvellous to achieve. "IT" was a goal, an end point, perhaps even the final milepost standing at the end of the road.

The last chapter argued that Dean achieves "IT", and the result, for him, is demonstrated in his final form as witnessed by Sal in Part Five. It will now be argued that Dean's "IT" is analogous to, if not virtually identical with, "enlightenment" or satori in the Zen tradition. That argument will follow along two paths, parallel, with surfaces reflecting light upon each other. One path is concerned with a rather brief scientific exploration of "enlightenment" in terms of the brain's electrical activity, and of observed behaviour, in an "enlightened" person. The other path is, then, a comparison of Dean's behaviour in **On The Road** to that paradigm example from science. These paths remain separate, however, because objective "hard" science cannot measure the subjectivity of Kerouac's art. Nevertheless, reinterpreting the subjective through some reference to objective measurement of ostensibly parallel experience is revealing; and it leads to a fascinating conclusion about the meaning and value of this novel.

To begin, we must examine the science, and in order to do that we must import into this text several short excerpts relating to the question being raised here. In August 1986, a conference entitled Eastern Approaches to Self and Mind was held at the University of Cardiff, in Wales. The conference was the product of increasing interest among clinical psychologists in meditation and Buddhist psychology. Exactly what happens within the brain when someone starts to meditate has puzzled Western psychology. How, for example, does one measure what is going on? A way to approach the problem was demonstrated at the meeting by a consulting clinical neurophysiologist. Dr. Peter Fenwick measured electrical activity in the brain of a Buddhist monk. He also reported on some of his experiments on a "self-confessed Zen master -- 'I [Fenwick] had to take his word for it: we don't have an enlightenment meter to check it.'"[1] These experiments were done using an electroencephalograph linked to a computer. In this way, Fenwick was able to present his evidence for definite increases in electrical activity within the right brain hemisphere of his Zen master, and of other meditators he had tested, in easy-to-grasp oval diagrams and "read-outs" which mapped the regions of electrical activity in the brains of these people. Upon the computer screens the following was revealed:

> **For each of the long term meditators, there on the right-hand side of the skull was a large yellow area indicating high activity. "If we saw that degree of asymmetry in someone from off the street," said one of the operators, "we'd be worried that something very abnormal was going on."[2]**

Dr. Fenwick's Zen master is the paradigm to be used here for comparison with Dean Moriarty. For the next few pages, we will consider Fenwick's findings. Then, we shall look at examples of Dean's behaviour both in the light of this paradigm and in the context of Boyle's conclusions about "IT" and religion. From that concatenation will follow the logical deduction that since Dean and the Zen Master share certain qualities relating to Zen "enlightenment", then Dean's "IT" has virtually the quality of satori.

Following the Cardiff conference, Dr. Fenwick elaborated on his work with this individual in a radio interview. According to Dr. Fenwick, his subject

> describes the world in a strange way. He claims that he is always "in the moment." You know that you and I, when we are thinking, we think about the past, and we think about the future. We delve into fantasies. He says he is not like that at all. He says that he is rooted forever in the present. It's only the present moment which is "lit" for him. . . . [H]e says one other thing, too. . . . that with his "present perception" of the world, he doesn't talk to himself. You know how you and I are always chatting to ourselves, and commenting on things internally. Well, he [doesn't] do that. He said the perceptions just arose within him, he acted, and they died down.[3]

Dr. Fenwick then described tests used on this willing subject, including the usual psychological ones followed by an attempt to "classically condition" him.

> We did straight forward psychological tests. Now, these psychological tests are part of IQ testing. We weren't doing it to test how intelligent he was, . . . but because we wanted to know whether the structure of his intelligence was all verbal, or nonverbal. What came out of that was that with verbal tests, he had considerable difficulty; whereas the nonverbal tests he did very easily indeed, thus giving some confirmation to the idea that he may be functioning more or less nonverbally. . . . Let me tell you about the activity of his brain first. If you look at the meditation literature, there is some suggestion that people from the Zen tradition do see every moment as "new", and their brain responds to each stimulus, that is -- each input, as if it had never seen it before. Now, if I give you a flick, your brain's responses to the flicks slowly decrease. You get used to it, in other words. In the literature, it suggests that this doesn't happen to people who follow the Zen tradition.
>
> So, was he like that or wasn't he? Well, the answer is, yes he was. We flashed a light in his eyes, and his brain responded [electrically] each time as if it had never seen it before. . . . The next thing we did was to see whether we could classically condition him. . . . -- you remember Pavlov and his dogs? . . . What we did was use a puff of air, and an eye blink. If you puff air into the eye it will cause you to blink. Now, if you show a normal person a light before the puff of air -- and the blink -- they will, when you show them the light, follow this with an eye blink. In other words, they have been conditioned to the light. Now, he was quite unable to do this.
>
> And this, really, again was very surprising to us, because in our laboratory we've had patients who have no memory--in other words, their memory systems have been damaged by disease; we've also had brain-damaged people as well, who are demented, and really don't know what is

> going on in a perceptual world; and they can all do this. It's a very simple and easy thing to do. Now, he didn't. And, that, really, to us, was very unusual. . . . He said he treated each stimulus as if it was independent of any other one. In other words, the light he saw was independent of the puff of air, and, he knew nothing of the eye blink, because he hadn't been told. So, it looks as if we were getting physiological confirmation of what he was experiencing.[4]

How, then, would the subject use his two brain hemispheres, compared with average, or normal people? Dr. Fenwick said that

> in the [psychological] tests which we did, the normal person would use his left hemisphere to do the verbal part, and his right hemisphere to do the nonverbal tasks. Now, what he seemed to be doing is to be using his right hemisphere almost exclusively, and preferentially. So, he didn't get the same degree of activation in his left hemisphere from the verbal tasks that you or I would, thus suggesting that although the intelligence tests that we did showed he was entirely capable of using his left hemisphere -- there was nothing wrong with it -- he prefers, in dealing with actual problems, a right-hemisphere set. The final conclusion we came to was that he probably did have a different perceptual set from you and I. And, that his own description of seeing the world always "in the moment", and not being waylaid by verbal thoughts, and getting attached to thinking about the past and the future, could be correct.[5]

Thus, it may well be that the Zen master's right brain hemisphere does function slightly differently from normal. But was it because of

Zen training? Was his right hemisphere always unusual? Was he different genetically? Or, was he brain damaged? Dr. Fenwick says there is no clear answer to this, "because we didn't know him before he reached the stage of 'enlightenment'."[6] Yet another question comes up as well. Does satori hold out any real advantages which makes it something people should struggle to achieve? Dr. Fenwick is not sure, but he claims that in this case, the subject

> **certainly appears to be a less "personal" person. By that I mean he doesn't face the slings and arrows of the world as personally as we do. And certainly, he now seemed to live very much "in the moment", and to be, predominantly, in a spatial world rather than a verbal world like some of us are. But is that an advantage? I don't know. He says it is.**[7]

Current theories about the functions of the two hemispheres make an important distinction as to what it is that each side is specialized for. And that distinction appears to have important implications for communications theory. As a specialist in that field, McLuhan made extensive use of theoretical material on the subject in arriving at his own conclusions about the present and future of communication, education, politics, work, art and relationships within the community. As briefly noted in Chapter 1, McLuhan felt that tribal man was indelibly mythic, and the epic poems memorized and sung in an oral culture made their myths the "operating wisdom" of the tribal Greeks, and he believes such a tribal and mythic world based on oral, not written legends, would be best related to by acoustic rather than visual minds.

Human brain researchers agree that the right hemisphere can be described as giving priority to acoustic, non-linear, and qualitative faculties. This area of the brain is associated with dreaming. To go back to Nietzsche for a moment, his notions of illusion and delight, dream and intoxication, Apollo and Dionysus, the dying and reviving gods of the seasons, and dithyrambic music, all would be expressions relating to the right hemisphere. Other associations relating to the right hemisphere would tend to be sensual, liquid, and cool, all directed toward and formed within the nighttime darkness.

In contrast, the left hemisphere is considered to be the area of the brain which tends to process information that can be handled in a linear and syntactic way. It relates best to patterns, sequences, continuums, connections, classifications, abstractions, analyses, inventories, and quantities. Using Nietzsche's analogies again for a moment, he would associate Socrates and Plato with qualities we think of today as relating to the left hemisphere. Its symbolic associations are with daylight and dry air (or gas), and with fire. Above all, our left hemispheres are where we create for ourselves our visually organized worlds, our visual space, our "Paper America."

McLuhan claims a relationship exists between the development of "Euclidian space" -- that visual organization of space in the mind of Western man -- and the coming into being of the phonetic alphabet. For example, he suggests that "until man intensifies the visual parameters of his life by writing, he cannot enclose space."[8] He also feels, as we saw earlier, that the rise of the alphabet led to the fall of tribal man, overcome and displaced by the rise of literate and individual "detribalized" men who were, and are, habituated to using their left hemispheres to cope with the world they have made for themselves. Theirs [and ours] is an a posteriori world, a mental structure. By inference, then, tribal man would have used his right hemisphere preferentially, and would consequently have dealt with a wholly different a priori world in a wholly different way, because his mind would have been organized on a different basis. The tribal world just is.

Let us now propose the notion that Sal and Dean are on separate mental tracks somewhat similar to those McLuhan describes for "detribalized" and for tribal man. One certainly does not have to accept McLuhan's ideas as any sort of revealed truth in order to use them as a source of analogy for decoding and describing aspects of new American myths deriving from On The Road. However, these mental tracks Sal and Dean follow in the course of the novel are divergent, and the question is why? We can decode the reason for this as follows: a) clearly, Sal is left-hemisphere oriented, since he is a writer (which requires logical, linear cognition) and he always feels he should follow a plan. Meanwhile Dean tends more and more toward right hemisphere domination throughout the novel, until in Part Five he comes to resemble very much Dr. Fenwick's mystic who lives "in the moment", for whom only the present is "lit", who is a man of action for whom perceptions arise -- he acts -- and then they diminish, and who also has some difficulty with verbal tasks such as, in Dean's case, syntax, logical and linear speech patterns, and coherence.

When we concentrate on following the mental tracks of our two protagonists through the novel we find them moving toward each other in the beginning, running parallel to each other for a time, and then finally diverging entirely in virtually opposite directions. When they first meet, each is attracted to the mental priorities of the other. Thus, Sal puts his novel writing aside, tries to find in himself an acoustic mind, and begins to listen -- to Dean, and to America itself. Meanwhile Dean tries to become a writer and an intellectual. In effect, they attract each other enough to cause each to diverge from his usual mental tracks; but the effect cannot last. Eventually both return toward their former states, although Sal has been transformed and enlarged by his experience, while Dean swings far beyond his earlier track in his mad pursuit of "IT", finally achieving a mental state closely akin to satori.

The evidence for all this within On The Road is clear. We've already considered Dean's "undevelopment", and looked at it from a fully left-brain perspective. From that perspective, Dean gradually became a very strange creature indeed. One might suspect he was virtually insane. But, if we can imagine what a right-brain perspective on Dean might be like, perhaps we could say he was "a less 'personal' person" as Dr. Fenwick describes the Zen master, someone who does not face the "slings and arrows" of life in quite the same way as we do, or who lives "in the moment" without much concern for either the past or the future; indeed, someone who has made up his mind "about time."[9]

Perhaps our new right-brain perspective would find Dean quite an attractive figure. He is a storyteller, after all, as well as a being with a powerful sensuality, one who swings between the seasons of dream and the dithyramb, and who is so grandly mythic that he is angelic to those who have the eyes to see "IT" in him. He is a whole person in the sense that he is self-contained and belongs anywhere he goes. His feelings of kinship for the "Fellahin Indians of the world" (p. 280), and Sal's observation of the Indians watching Dean "with eyes of hawks" (p. 299), seem to indicate a "retribalization" trend within him. And his dedication to "bebop" style music, together with its electric effect on him, tends to support the thesis of Dean's right-hemispheric, acoustic orientation. Finally, and convincingly, Dean's placement of himself "within the moment", trying to hold onto "IT", is a virtual copy of the mental attitude and posture of Dr. Fenwick's Zen master.

What, then, is to be made of this notion that Dean has achieved a kind of satori, and why is it of any importance? Dean was the "HOLY GOOF" (p. 194) and an "angel" as Sal "always knew he would become" (p. 263). In Sal's eyes, to become an angel is to become enlightened, and to possess "the secret that we're all bursting to find" (p. 195). It comes from the ultimate West, from "emptyheaded" California (p. 79), and from the "blue and vast" (p. 78) foggy Pacific. It is a new and grand myth for America: that time can be controlled, space conquered -- even the vast spatial sense of "all that raw land that rolls in one unbelievable huge bulge over to the West Coast" (p. 309) -- through the blessing of "the coming of complete night that blesses the earth, darkens all rivers, cups the peaks and folds the final shore in" (p. 310); and that a oneness with the universe, the environment, the land and the people can be achieved through a transfiguring of the American mind.

The religious dimension of the foregoing must also be accounted for. Zen represents a specific movement or sect within the Buddhist religious tradition. However, as far as we know, Dean never saw the inside of a temple. According to Boyle,"**On The Road** preaches the antithesis to life: religion."[10] This life is marked by its transitory nature. That is why anyone with a "religious nature" has a very strong, even "acute" feeling about that reality, "a sharp sensitivity for the feeling of **loss**," and from which comes "the need for the absolute, for the infinite, for that which does not die, for the 'better world'."[11] All of these needs require the absolute opposite of the human condition.

Boyle's point is that there is a deep dissatisfaction with human existence at work in the novel. Even though the novel is marked by a "virtual total absence"[12] of disillusion with life -- after all, Dean says "yes!" to nearly everything he encounters or feels -- this is a contradiction that is, says Boyle, only apparent. It is not real, because this "uniform 'positivity'" is what gives the best evidence that the novel's true message is denial -- "a denial which encompasses any true experience of life."[13] So, how can this be?

> The way of life which the novel chronicles, Dean and Sal's travels back and forth across the U.S. and Mexico, is absolutely affirmative because any experience which fails to provoke an intensely pleasurable sensation is felt to be unendurable. . . . This rejection of life, which encompasses all but the rarest and most fleeting of human experiences, ecstasy, comes to the fore . . . when the religious seekers find . . . dread unecstatic conditions. The novel is at its most powerful, most genuine, when it gives voice to the first of these unecstatic conditions, the feeling of 'deadness' which . . . torments Dean and Sal beyond endurance.[14]

A good example of that kind of "spiritless" life Sal was trying to escape is the listless Christmas he spends with his Testament, Virginia relatives who sit around all day talking in "low, whining voices" (p. 109) about nothing much. Dean rescues Sal from this "weary" situation in a new Hudson and spirits him away to California upon a surge of ecstasy. Boyle believes that this is an example of the general plan of the novel. Sal is caught again and again in terminal ennui, and then Dean saves him -- carries him to yet another ecstatic experience. Together they flee "a life that has become a living death."[15]

Boyle's great insight is his recognition that On The Road is a "categorical rejection of any kind of displeasure or 'negativity'."[16] Dean's "trial", where Galatea Dunkel accuses Dean of being irresponsible, even immoral, seems at first to be a criticism of Galatea's form of morality. But, suggests Boyle, what is really going on here is that it is "**the condition of being displeased,** that is being criticised. It is only from this standpoint that society is ever attacked in the novel [italics in the original]."[17] By the middle of the novel, the "religious wish" to escape all negativity becomes, says Boyle, a "categorical imperative: thou shalt not endure the presence of pain -- yours or anyone else's,"[18] as when Dean remarks that "troubles you see is the generalization word for what God exists in. The thing is not to get hung up." (p.120)

With that imperative in mind, then, we can now begin to look at "IT" as being a religious objective. "IT" represents the "better world" Boyle has set forth as the usual religious goal. In this case, for Dean, "It" is Eden, a "better world", which is "an unflinching state of being which is the synthesis of great intensity of feeling and pleasurable feeling. In one word: ecstasy."[19] And how is this religious goal to be achieved? Boyle suggests Dean began his search for "IT" in a mode where "ecstasy is attained through activity, effort: One actively manipulates and reshapes one's life until it gives off an uniformly exhilarating effect."[20] However, Dean's "development" moves into a new form in which

> **ecstasy is attained passively. Dean just lets life wash over him. He no longer needs to act because whatever form the world unfolds itself in before him is inevitably experienced as fantastic, stupendous, enthralling. All life being thus, Dean is content to contemplate. . . . It is in this particular turn, from the sensual to the contemplative approach to life, that the pursuit of ecstasy ["IT"] takes a distinctively religious form.**[21]

Dean in his state of grace and given over to contemplation is very much in the mode of the Zen master upon whom the "slings and arrows" of life make little impression. The analogy is that as Dean struggles to achieve "IT", he gradually moves into this alternate mode of being, which is analogous to a switch from left to right hemisphere dominance. That is the religious aspect of Dean's "IT." His contemplative ecstasy is lived upon a mental plane which corresponds to virtually a direct copy of that exhibited by the "enlightened" mystic. In this sense, it can be argued that "IT" is closely akin to satori, and that in fact, On The Road uses aspects of Zen to produce Dean's new American myth.

Dean is America. That is, he embodies America's edenic dream even as he is the representative American in the special sense that everyone fears becoming lost within the vastness of this huge continent. He is America. Thus, his transcendence can be America's. He has won the secret all America desires. All that is required is to follow Dean on the road down to "timeless" Mexico, out to meet the tribesmen, into the heart of the city's skid row, into the jungle, into the heart of darkness, and there will America find its reality, its promise, and its salvation. The new myth of Dean Moriarty would persuade America away from its daylight frenzy back to its roots in a primal darkness, would empty the left hemisphere of its folly and bid the mind to listen again to the romance and deep wisdom of the right hemisphere. The new myth would tell the listeners that Americans could and should return once more to that original right and proper road. Along that road had earlier begun America's historic expansion into the Mississippi valley, heading for California, toward the one and true home and landscape of the imagination. But, in the end, the one who went all the way was Dean, left to travel out alone on the road to a Pacific satori out beyond the reach of time.

NOTES

[1] **Jerome Burne,** "Half a mind to meditate," New Scientist, Vol. 111 No. 1522 (21 August 1986), P. 49.

[2] Ibid.

[3] **Dr. Peter Fenwick,** "Quirks and Quarks," CBC Radio, January 1987. (not published - see appendix i for transcript)

[4] Ibid.

[5] Ibid.

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid.

[8] **Marshall McLuhan,** "The Role of New Media in Social Change," Antigonish Review, 74-75 (1988), p. 44.

[9] **Jack Kerouac,** On The Road (New York: Penguin, 1976), p. 195. All subsequent references to this text will appear in parentheses.

[10] **James Boyle**, "'IT! IT!' - On The Road As Religion," Recovering literature: A Journal of Contextual Criticism, Vol. 15 (Summer 1987), p. 20.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Boyle, p. 21.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Ibid.

[15] Boyle, p. 23.

[16] Ibid.

[17] Boyle, p. 24.

[18] Boyle, p. 26.

[19] Ibid.

[20] Boyle, p. 30.

[21] Ibid.

CONCLUSION

As has been demonstrated here, On The Road is a mythic novel which establishes the figure of Dean Moriarty as the focus for a new myth of America. Its mythos conforms to Aristotle's view that the myth maker, the poet, describes the kinds of things that might happen because they are probable and necessary. Here, we have considered the figure of Dean within pre-existing myth in several ways. He is a nietzschean superman travelling on the American roads, roads which offer the lure of freedom for Kerouac's characters just as the forest trails did for Cooper's. He is a new version of Ahab set adrift within a continental ocean and driven mad in his effort to capture the white whale time. And there is, in this novel, a new source of myth for the American imagination which comes from the Moriarty figure, a myth about the eventual restructuring of the American mind. All these elements of myth are present in the novel, and their existence, including the new Dean Moriarty myth of the restructured mind, support the thesis that On The Road employs a "mythic plot" to provide its structure and unity.

Now if, as is suggested in Chapter 4, the theme in Part Five of the novel is prophecy about approaching changes in America's mental landscape, one is left with a feeling that Norman Podhoretz may have instinctively recognized his enemy in Dean Moriarty. Podhoretz, the white knight of the left hemisphere, seemed to realize at once that he was at war with Dean, the red knight of the right hemisphere. Although it would be surprising if either Podhoretz or Kerouac ever thought of it in expressly these terms, the analyses given in the 117 pages above suggest that the novel traces a struggle for supremacy between the mental forces of the left and right hemispheres, figuratively speaking, over the future of the American mind. Now, as America moves ever closer to embrace right-brain "enlightenment", just as the new myth seems to indicate is possible and necessary, and as McLuhan seemed to suggest is happening, Podhoretz' bell-ringing should be remembered. His Partisan Review article of 1958, "The Know-Nothing Bohemians," is still the most shrill and sweeping attack ever published against Kerouac, against On The Road, and against the Beat Generation. Podhoretz seems to have recognized that Dean Moriarty stands as the embodiment of something new in America, of a new myth with an ominous aspect to those who hold vested interests in a status quo. Podhoretz warns that the war cry of the "Bohemian" bums is to "kill the intellectuals." He thus recognized the threat to established mental states posed by those who reject or drop out of them, which, as we have shown, was Dean's mythic example.

Kerouac leaves little that is ambiguous about the mythic underpinnings of his novel. We have attempted to trace the outlines of the older American myths as they appear in **On The Road**. In that manner, we have demonstrated the presence of the myth of edenic renewal, and we have considered the myth that time might be transcended; what once was thought of as a means to pass beyond the guilty thrall of history has become a myth transmuted in the novel into a notion that an ecstatic and transcendent response to painful reality can be achieved. The old myth of the garden is thus revived, suggesting that the roots to the old American garden are still alive, and that in the times to come, Americans will search for, seek out, those roots. This seeking would be the product of a change in the American mind set, permitting Americans to at last come to terms with their landscape, rather than continually being at war with it.

And finally, we have Sal renewing the tradition and bringing up to date the myth of the messenger. Like Mercury bringing forth the news of a new hero, he is seated on a dock not too far, probably, from whence Ishmael once regarded the "insular city of the Manhattoes", and certainly he is not far from that other dark tale teller on any mental line that might be drawn to link them. Sal too is a sailor, although he has turned his back to the sea, facing inland instead toward America's other ocean, its continental bulk that bulges over and beyond the western horizon. He also chooses a form for his tale about Dean which resembles Ishmael's tale about Ahab, a long monologue from which nothing of the history of events appears to have been left out. It is the classic form of the American legend, presented in the vernacular and apparently without any dissembling, although -- as was pointed out at the beginning -- prone to bits of exaggeration. The tale teller expects his audience to believe every word he speaks.

And "speaks" is the operative word, since the novel has the appearance of an oral presentation as if it were an oral legend in the likeness of an epic poem sung or told by the bard for the instruction of his listeners, and privileged to present both sides of the mental war he has been witness to. That is the form Kerouac's fictive devices give to the novel, and as such this form fits very well with the mythic elements that provide its structure; taken together, the form and the mythos give the novel all the unity it requires for success as a work of art. As well, this thirty-five-year-old novel underlines very well the continuing value to America of works of art which take on the task of helping to work out America's mental accommodation to its social and literary history.

Kerouac touched on something which young minds still find compelling. The warring forces of the mind which his novel describes in terms of the Beat Generation were and are real even if the mcluhanesque analogies for them are applied only in retrospect. Perhaps the right sides of our brains are readily able to tune in to the truth even before our left sides have the words to write descriptions of what is happening. Perhaps that is where Kerouac's prophetic approach to literature rests; he provided the mythic picture of the struggle for the future which was already underway when Sal Paradise first packed his bag and headed West.

We need our legends. We need to know the narrative that tells us how and why things are. We may be able to identify the creator of a myth, but if -- as Wellek and Warren describe the process -- the myth qualifies as being "accepted by the community"[1] for which it was created, then the fact that the myth maker is not faceless, not anonymous, recedes. What really counts, for modern day mythology, is that it explains something about the present, and that it helps create a footing or ground for experience. Then, experience in and of itself can become something which has context, and credibility.

It is in that context that Kerouac has offered the Beat Generation, almost as a subspecies from the underground, but one which is rich in romantic counter-culture myth-stuff. Out of that milieu he has successfully drawn what he calls a comic legend, of which On The Road is the basic part. The book has been out thirty-five years. It continues to spark controversy. It continues to live. It does so because of its mythic content. Its success rests upon its structure of mythic elements.

NOTES

[1] Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, Theory of Literature: New Revised Edition (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1970), p. 191.

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Appendix

Quirks and Quarks, CBC Radio Program
Broadcast in Edmonton, Alberta at
12:20 pm Saturday, January 3rd., 1987.
Host: Jay Ingram, who begins with the following
introduction.

Jay Ingram:

What goes on in a Guru's brain; a man who has meditated and achieved new levels of consciousness?

It is a strange question. But it's been answered by Dr. Peter Fenwick, consulting neurophysiologist at the Maudsley Hospital in London, England.

Dr. Fenwick met a man who said he was "enlightened." That is, by using techniques of Zen, the Japanese mystical form of Buddhism, he had reached the level or plateau of "enlightenment", where he saw the world differently than non-enlightened people do. It's a difficult concept to grasp. It sounds like the kind of thing where you would only know what enlightenment is if you achieved it.

But Dr. Fenwick wanted to know if this man's brain worked differently. That is, is there anything measurably different about an "enlightened" brain? He focused particularly on the differences between the right and left sides of the brain. The two sides process information differently. In most people, the left hemisphere is verbal; the speech centres are there. The right hemisphere is nonverbal. It's preoccupied with where things are in the space around you in a "3-D" world. Is an "enlightened" person different in the way he uses the verbal and nonverbal areas of the brain?

Dr. Fenwick, could you first give me a picture of what this man is like?

Dr. Fenwick:

He describes the world in a strange way. He claims that he is always "in the moment." You know that you and I, when we are thinking, we think about the past, and we think about the future. We delve into fantasies. He says he is not like that at all. He says that he is rooted forever in the present. It's only the present moment which is "lit" for him. That meant, then, that if we were going to test this, we would have to see whether or not he was always in the present moment.

Now, he says one other thing, too. He says that with his "present perception" of the world, he doesn't talk to himself. You know how you and I are always chatting to ourselves, and commenting on things internally. Well, he didn't do that. He said the perceptions just arose within him, he acted, and they died down. So that meant, then, that there was probably something different about the way that he processed verbal material. So, our strategies, then, were to see: was his attention different, were the ways his brain functioned, in terms of verbal and nonverbal material, different?

Jay Ingram:

Tell me what you did.

Peter Fenwick:

What we did was, we did straight forward psychological tests. Now, these psychological tests are part of IQ testing. We weren't doing it to test how intelligent he was, and he certainly was above average intelligence, but because we wanted to know whether the structure of his intelligence was all verbal, or nonverbal. What came out of that was that with verbal tests, he had considerable difficulty; whereas the nonverbal tests he did very easily indeed, thus giving some confirmation to the idea that he may be functioning more or less nonverbally.

Jay Ingram:

Was it possible for you to, in a sense, visualize how his brain was working?

Peter Fenwick:

Yes. We could look at that through the electrical activity of his brain, and we also did some rather interesting tests, which were conditioning tests.

Let me tell you about the activity of his brain first. If you look at the meditation literature, there is some suggestion that people from the Zen tradition do see every moment as "new", and their brain responds to each stimulus, that is -- each input, as if it had never seen it before.

Now, if I give you a flick, your brain's responses to the flicks slowly decreases. You get used to it, in other words. In the literature, it suggests that this doesn't happen to people who follow the Zen tradition.

So, was he like that or wasn't he? Well, the answer is, yes he was. We flashed a light in his eyes, and his brain responded [electrically] each time as if it had never seen it before.

Jay Ingram:

Is that a level of activity in the brain that is under conscious control?

Peter Fenwick:

It's not usually under conscious control. But like all these investigations in unusual people, it may be that he just had the sort of brain that could control it. It's something very unusual. So that was one thing we did.

The next thing we did was to see whether we could classically condition him. Now then, when I say "classically conditioned", --you remember Pavlov and his dogs? You remember that he showed the dogs food, and they salivated? Well, we didn't use food and salivation. What we did was use a puff of air, and an eye blink. If you puff air into the eye it will cause you to blink. Now, if you show a normal person a light before the puff of air--and the blink--they will, when you show them the light, follow this with an eye blink. In other words, they have been conditioned to the light.

Now, he was quite unable to do this. And this, really, again was very surprising to us, because in our laboratory we've had patients who have no memory--in other words, their memory systems have been damaged by disease; we've also had brain-damaged people as well, who are demented, and really don't know what is going on in a perceptual world; and they can all do this. It's a very simple and easy thing to do. Now, he didn't. And, that, really, to us, was very unusual.

Jay Ingram:

What did that suggest to you?

Peter Fenwick:

Well, again, it comes back to the way that he describes the process. He said he treated each stimulus as if it was independent of any other one. In other words, the light he saw was independent of the puff of air, and, he knew nothing of the eye blink, because he hadn't been told. So, it looks as if we were getting physiological confirmation of what he was experiencing.

Jay Ingram:

In a nutshell, Dr. Fenwick, how would his use of the two hemispheres compare with, say, mine, provided I'm average, or normal?

Peter Fenwick:

In the electrical tests which we did, the normal person would use his left hemisphere to do the verbal part, and his right hemisphere to do the nonverbal tasks. Now, what he seemed to be doing is to be using his right hemisphere almost exclusively, and preferentially. So, he didn't get the same degree of activation in his left hemisphere from the verbal tasks that you or I would, thus suggesting that although the intelligence tests that we did showed he was entirely capable of using his left hemisphere--there was nothing wrong with it--he prefers, in dealing with actual problems, a right-hemisphere set. The final conclusion we came to was that he probably did have a different perceptual set from you and I. And, that his own description of seeing the world always "in the moment", and not being waylaid by verbal thoughts, and getting attached to thinking about the past and the future, could be correct. So, possibly, it may be that his right hemisphere does function slightly differently from yours and mine.

But that raises an interesting question, and the question, then, is: did this [happen] because he had gone through Zen training? Is it because his right hemisphere always was unusual? Was this because he's genetically different? Or, could it be that at some time he suffered brain damage, and this has led to his right hemisphere being different from normal? There is no clear answer to this, because we didn't know him before he reached the stage of "enlightenment."

But, another question comes up. Does this stage of enlightenment as we see it reflected in our tests hold any advantages? Is this something which you and I should be struggling for? I think, probably, if he is "enlightened", then he certainly appears to be a less "personal" person. By that I mean he doesn't face the slings and arrows of the world as personally as we do. And certainly, he now seemed to live very much "in the moment", and to be, predominantly, in a spatial world rather than a verbal world like some of us are. But is that an advantage? I don't know. He says it is.

Jay Ingram:

Thank you very much, Dr. Fenwick.

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